

# Destabilizing the Lincoln Memorial Concert: A Look at the Career of Marian Anderson

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## ABSTRACT

Alexandra Kori Hill:  
Destabilizing the Lincoln Memorial Concert: A Look at the Career of Marian Anderson  
(Under the direction of David Garcia)

This thesis will re-contextualize the Lincoln Memorial Concert within Marian Anderson's performing career between 1935–1950 to illustrate her navigation of public and critical reception of her public image, musical talent, and political engagement in American society. A critical understanding of the social and political balancing required of Anderson as a black female classical vocalist will be achieved through discussion and analysis of correspondence between Anderson and her management, filmed performances, and critique of the prominent historical positioning of the Lincoln Memorial Concert. While the length of this thesis will not allow for extensive treatment, it is intended to precipitate new approaches to historical, cultural, and musical studies of Anderson's life and career that destabilize the authority of the Lincoln Memorial performance and engage with her extensive performing career pre – and post – 1939.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION: THE NARRATIVE OF MARIAN ANDERSON’S CAREER.....	1
Literature Review.....	4
Methodologies.....	7
CHAPTER ONE: ANDERSON’S VOCALITY IN PUBLIC & PRIVATE SPACE.....	18
Black Female Vocality.....	21
The Meso and Macro Manifestations of Anderson’s Vocality.....	27
CHAPTER TWO: ANDERSON & THE RACIALIZATION OF CLASSICAL MUSIC .....	33
Black Vocality and the Racialization of Classical Music: A Short History.....	34
Right to Use & Enjoyment, Right to Exclude: Anderson & Stokowski, 1944 .....	38
Rights of Disposition and Commanding the Stage: Anderson, 1950 .....	43
CHAPTER THREE: THE LINCOLN MEMORIAL CONCERT & THE LIMITS OF LIBERALISM .....	50
The Controversy and the Concert’s Limitations.....	53
BIBLIOGRAPHY .....	67

## INTRODUCTION

### The Narrative of Marian Anderson's Career

*"A voice like yours is heard  
once in a hundred years."*<sup>1</sup>

When you hear the name, "Marian Anderson," what words come to mind? Most likely "African American opera singer," "civil rights," or "Lincoln Memorial." Most likely, all three will come to mind, and these associations would not be incorrect. Marian Anderson is a major figure in American history, her profession as a vocalist often tangential to the political importance of one life event that garnered public attention. Barred from performing in D.A.R. Constitution Hall by the Daughters of the American Revolution due to their "whites only" policy for performers, a combination of public outcry and action by activists and First Lady Eleanor Roosevelt resulted in the Lincoln Memorial Concert on Easter Sunday of 1939.<sup>2</sup> This event continues to be viewed as a catalyst to reveal the ignorance of racism and the need for desegregation in American society. That a woman this talented, this capable, would not be allowed into one of the premier concert halls of Washington DC was morally inexcusable. It was time for (white) Americans to awaken to their hypocrisy and see the humanity of their fellow citizens of color. It was time for Anderson's potential to be shared with the nation and the world.

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<sup>1</sup>Toscanini, Arturo. "Remembering the Life of Marian Anderson." *PBS Newshour*, February 26, 1997. [http://www.pbs.org/newshour/bb/remember-jan-june97-anderson\\_02-26a/](http://www.pbs.org/newshour/bb/remember-jan-june97-anderson_02-26a/). (Accessed May 12, 2017)

<sup>2</sup>Carnegie Hall. "Marian Anderson – Seven Decades at Carnegie Hall and Beyond: From the Carnegie Hall Archives," YouTube Website, 3:23. [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uJIsCmHAbI8&index=3&list=PLhJh3vZTgexMh6yQ\\_Zk4UBRILsLcAvwqN](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uJIsCmHAbI8&index=3&list=PLhJh3vZTgexMh6yQ_Zk4UBRILsLcAvwqN) (Accessed May 11, 2017); Keiler, p. 259.

Except she had already been sharing it. Prior to the Constitution Hall controversy, Anderson had successfully maintained a career in the predominately white mainstream since the mid-1930s and had been a celebrated professional vocalist for well over a decade in black American communities. She retired after nearly six decades, having performed in the United States, Caribbean, South America, Asia, England, and the European continent. Her participation in political activism did not start that Easter Sunday. As a vocalist who studied repertoire in classical and black American religious traditions, she continued the practice started by her colleague and friend Harry T. Burleigh in programming arrangements of spirituals on her recitals.<sup>3</sup> Her critical and economic success with white and black audiences and critics challenged the racialization of classical music and helped desegregate recital, opera, and concert halls in the audience and on stage.<sup>4</sup>

When we think “Marian Anderson,” and call to mind the Lincoln Memorial Concert, civil rights, a black classical vocalist, we are bringing forth only a small part of what Anderson achieved and contributed in her profession. The progressive politics that accompany discussion of Anderson’s career correctly identify the societal impact of the music she performed, where she performed, and for whom she performed.<sup>5</sup> But it fails to engage with this impact outside of the Lincoln Memorial Concert. This performance and the Constitution Hall controversy occupy a disproportionate place in Anderson’s narrative in public and academic discourses. It is a

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<sup>3</sup>Snyder, Jean. *Harry T. Burleigh: From the Spiritual to the Harlem Renaissance*. Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2016, p. 304

<sup>4</sup>Keiler, A. *Marian Anderson: A Singer’s Journey*. Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2000.

<sup>5</sup>“Special: Marian Anderson Sings to 75,000 at the Lincoln Memorial” in *The Journal of Negro Education*, Vol. 8, No. 2 (April 1939): 260; Arsenault, Raymond. *The Sound of Freedom: Marian Anderson, the Lincoln Memorial, and the Concert that Awakened America*. New York: Bloomsbury Press, 2009, p. 2-3.

perspective that fails to account for her success as a vocalist at the national and international level, her years of focused study and practice, her refusal to perform for segregated audiences, and acknowledgement of her function as a role model for thousands of young black American women and men.

This thesis will re-contextualize the Lincoln Memorial Concert within Marian Anderson's performing career between 1935–1950 to illustrate her navigation of public and critical reception of her public image, musical talent, and political engagement in American society. A critical understanding of the social and political balancing required of Anderson as a black female classical vocalist will be achieved through discussion and analysis of correspondence between Anderson and her management, filmed performances, and critique of the prominent historical positioning of the Lincoln Memorial Concert. While the length of this thesis will not allow for extensive treatment, it is intended to precipitate new approaches to historical, cultural, and musical studies of Anderson's life and career that destabilize the authority of the Lincoln Memorial performance and engage with her extensive performing career pre – and post – 1939.

Anderson's navigation of the cultural symbolism and weight of her success as defined by herself and others, her interpretive decisions, and interactions with her manager, Sol Hurok, require the following frameworks to unpack these layers of societal engagement during her years as a performer. Intersectional uses of critical race theory and vocality will supply the necessary methods to discuss these aspects of Anderson's career and to expand academic and public comprehensions of her contribution to the histories of African Americans, classical music, and racialization in the United States in the mid – twentieth century.

## Literature Review

The literature on Marian Anderson is predominately focused on her performance at the Lincoln Memorial, though there are significant biographical publications that go beyond that moment in her career. The materials address K-5 students, young adults, adult readers, and academics, and show the various ways Anderson's biography has been interpreted.<sup>6</sup> The following publications are the primary monographs, articles, and academic texts from the past twenty years that have contributed to this much needed discussion of Anderson's musical education and career.

*Marian Anderson: A Singer's Journey* by Allen Keiler is the most comprehensive scholarly biography to date, drawing upon financial, personal, and musical materials from the Marian Anderson Collection at the University of Pennsylvania. Combined with the archival papers are interviews with Anderson, her family members, and colleagues, making this monograph a highly valuable resource for the study of Anderson's life.<sup>7</sup> Anderson's discography and repertoire list is included at the back of the book, which makes it a good companion text to the bibliographic collection by Janet L. Sims-Wood: *Marian Anderson: An Annotated Bibliography and Discography*.<sup>8</sup> Anderson's autobiography *My Lord, What A Morning* provides fascinating insights into Anderson's understanding and crafting of the narrative of her life: what

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<sup>6</sup>Arsenault, Raymond. *The Sound of Freedom: Marian Anderson, the Lincoln Memorial, and the Concert that Awakened America*; Butler, Sara A. "The Art of Negotiation: Federal Arts, Civil Rights, and the Legacy of the Marian Anderson Concert, 1939-43" in *Winterthur Portfolio*, Vol. 40, No. 4 (Winter, 2005), pp. 175-204; Cheatham, Wallace McClain. "African-American Women Singers at the Metropolitan Opera before Leontyne Price" in *The Journal of Negro History*, Vol. 84, No. 2 (Spring, 1999), pp. 167-181; Dobrin, Arnold. *Voices of Joy, Voices of Freedom: Ethel Waters, Sammy Davis Jr., Marian Anderson, Paul Robeson, Lena Horne*. New York: Coward, McCann & Geoghegan, 1972; Jones, Victoria Garrett. *Marian Anderson: A Voice Uplifted*. New York/London: Sterling Publishing, 2008.

<sup>7</sup>Keiler, *Marian Anderson: A Singer's Journey*.

<sup>8</sup>Sims-Wood, Janet L. *Marian Anderson: An Annotated Bibliography and Discography*. Westport, Conn: Greenwood Press, 1981.



moments she prioritized, her ideas of interpretation and musical study, and her opinions on racial discrimination in the United States.<sup>9</sup> Published near the end of her performing career, it is an essential piece of writing in understanding Anderson's intense desire to (re)establish (some) control over her own narrative and place within American society. As will be discussed in the following chapters, such a response is likely tied to the very actions that precipitated the organization of the Lincoln Memorial Concert. Actions that Anderson appears to not have initially supported.

The remainder of academic scholarship on Anderson includes articles by Janell Hobson, Gayle Wald, and Nina Sun Eidsheim that engage with aspects of her career and musical training through much needed feminist and theoretical contexts. Hobson discusses the function of Anderson's performance on the steps of the Lincoln Memorial as a mode of black feminist protest, while Wald situates Anderson's acquiring of technique and understanding of her voice within the theoretical concept of vibrations as a mode for "critique[ing] an America prone to silencing black voices and erasing black presence."<sup>10</sup> Nina Sun Eidsheim's "Marian Anderson and 'Sonic Blackness' in American Opera" incorporates methods from the area of sound studies in discussions of the development of racialized sound in the United States as it was applied to black women vocalists trained in classical music.<sup>11</sup> Eidsheim charts the development and cultural expectations of racialized sound that contributed to listeners describing Anderson and other black

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<sup>9</sup>Anderson, Marian. *My Lord, What a Morning: An Autobiography*. New York: Viking Press, 1956.

<sup>10</sup>Hobson, Janell. "Everybody's Protest Song: Music as Social Protest in the Performances of Marian Anderson and Billie Holiday" in *Signs*, Vol. 33, No. 2 (Winter, 2008), pp. 443-448; Wald, Gayle. "Soul Vibrations: Black Music and Black Freedom in Sound and Space" in *American Quarterly*, Vol. 63, No. 3 (Sep 2011), pp. 674.

<sup>11</sup>Eidsheim, Nina Sun. "Marian Anderson and 'Sonic Blackness' in American Opera" in *American Quarterly*, Vol. 63, No. 3 (September 2011), pp. 641-671.

vocalists as possessing a “black” vocal timbre and retaining a dichotomy that kept the voices of black women as “other” regardless of their stylistic similarity to voices racialized as “white.”

Each of these books and articles provide important information on Anderson’s life, from the social significance of her success with mainstream audiences to how she was stylistically and racially categorized by members of the listening public. However, though the aforementioned materials either decenter or do not directly engage with the Lincoln Memorial Concert in relation to Anderson’s success amongst white audiences, they are either too narrow or broad in their scope to adequately investigate the problematic positioning of the Lincoln Memorial Concert within Anderson’s extensive career. They also do not directly address the ways her agency has been downplayed to the point of erasure in narratives of her life. Keiler does discuss this problem in reference to the conflicting uses of Anderson’s cultural capital by herself, activists, and politicians in public situations. But this information needs to be further foregrounded if Anderson’s agency in the construction and sustainment of her career is to become an integral part of her life’s story.

This thesis will build upon the work of Anderson, Keiler, Hobson, Wald, and Eidsheim to expound on the ways Anderson cultivated her public persona and protected her personal space before, during, and after the Lincoln Memorial Concert. Tied to the firm control she wished to maintain over her public image, Anderson was often guarded, but in a manner that strategically articulated amiability and shyness. The actions and rhetorical approaches she used (polite brevity in interviews regarding her personal life or political issues, to programming works composed or arranged by black composers) to protect her privacy and project a specific character easily interpreted by the public, paradoxically gave Anderson the privacy she required while also feeding into societal expectations of the agreeable (and thus respectable) black American

woman. The respect for her authority on the concert stage was not always transferred to areas of decision making in other areas of her public life. Anderson's public reticence on issues such as racism and the Constitution Hall controversy was not always honored by her collaborators and colleagues, who then acted on her behalf. The Lincoln Memorial Concert is emblematic of this lack of respect for her authority in this area.

This tension between how Anderson wanted to publicly present herself, how others felt she needed to present herself, and how she navigated moments when these perspectives did not align, must become a structural component in studies of her musical career. The following section will outline the methodological frameworks and chapter structure for this paper to articulate these tensions and bring Anderson's development and use of her voice as an aesthetic, technical, and politicized instrument to the forefront of these discussions.

## **Methodologies**

The organization of the following methodologies is not meant to rank their order of importance. As Anderson's life was multifaceted due to her identity as a black American woman, discussions of her life require a weaving of methods that can adequately engage with that lived experience. The use of vocality and critical race theory in an intersectional framework will be discussed in the following paragraphs as these methods are the most effective in respectfully studying the multiple facets of identity Anderson had to contend with in a discriminatory society.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>12</sup>Coined by scholar-activist Kimberlé Williams Crenshaw, "Intersectionality refers to particular forms of intersecting oppressions...race and gender, or of sexuality and nation." (Patricia Hill Collins, *Black Feminist Thought*, 2000) However, it has been a core component in the work of black feminists as far back as the late 1880s to discuss oppressions of black women that were not being addressed in the feminist movements and fight for racial equality. (Anna Julia Cooper, *A Voice from the South*, 1892)

The first of the methodological frameworks to be outlined is critical race theory. Critical race theory emerged in the late 1960s, breaking from Critical Legal Studies over lack of engagement with the reality of race's impact on foundational premises of legal practice and interpretation, often resulting in discriminatory rulings against black Americans.<sup>13</sup> The resulting scholarship from individuals such as Derrick Bell, Kimberlé Williams Crenshaw, and Eduardo Bonilla-Silva, to name a few, incorporated sociological, historical, feminist, and economic discourses on race to illustrate its use to create and reinforce racial inequality and maintain white dominance in American society.<sup>14</sup> Critical race theory contains multiple tenets to break down the systemic impact of racism and various manifestations of racialization in order to understand the ways these societal constructs work to sustain white political and cultural authority. The following three tenets of critical race theory will be applied in discussion of Marian Anderson to parse out the structural function of racial difference in the United States that simultaneously allowed for Anderson's mainstream success while maintaining the racial status quo.

The first tenet is *historical context*, which allows scholars, writers, and activists to illustrate the development of the race concept in Western civilization and its implementation to support the unequal racial hierarchy at the micro, meso, and macro levels of human interaction and societal systems.<sup>15</sup> Chapter One will discuss Anderson's role and impact on her manager's

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<sup>13</sup>Delgado, Richard. "Crossroads and Blind Alleys: A Critical Examination of Recent Writings About Race" in *Texas Law Review*, Vol. 82 (2003) p. 125.

<sup>14</sup>Bell, Derrick. "Racial Realism" in *Connecticut Law Review*, Vol. 24 (1992), pp. 363-380; Crenshaw, Kimberlé Williams. "Twenty Years of CRT: Looking Back to Move Forward" in *Connecticut Law Review*, Vol. 43, No. 5 (2011), pp. 1253-1352; Bonilla-Silva, Eduardo. "Rethinking Racism: Toward a Structural Interpretation" in *American Sociological Review*, Vol. 62, No. 3 (1997), pp. 465-480; Bonilla-Silva. *Racism Without Racists: Color-Blind Racism and the Persistence of Racial Inequality in America*, 4<sup>th</sup> edition. Lanham, Maryland: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 2014.

<sup>15</sup>Byng, Michelle D. "You Can't Get There from Here: A Social Process Theory of Racism and Race" in *Critical Sociology*, Vol. 39, No. 5, pp. 709-710.

scheduling of her recital tours in the context of the meso and macro levels of racialized society. The meso manifestation of race is present within “the site of public discourses and media that create public knowledge and commonsense,” which “...legitimizes how racial meanings are enacted at the macro and micro levels of society.”<sup>16</sup> Racism at the macro level is the easiest to hide and thus the most insidious, present in legislation, policy, and economic structures, “where the rationales and methods that can be used to advance interests and access are codified.”<sup>17</sup> Focusing on the meso and macro function of racial difference in the United States is not to ignore its presence at the micro level (which addresses individual interactions that can reinforce racism and racial inequality), but to illustrate the diverse ways the race concept, racialization, and racism are reinforced in American society and how it impacted Anderson’s approaches to subverting those limitations.

Charting the historical development of the concept of race at these various levels allows for the changing manifestation of racism to be excised. It challenges the mainstream discourse on race that shifted from (publicly) forbidding expressions of racial discrimination, to “colorblindness = true racial equality,” which emerged in the 1970s-1980s to purposefully avoid fixing the systemic racial issues that prevented progress towards racial equity.<sup>18</sup> This critical race theory tenet not only serves to situate Anderson’s touring and marketing of herself within the racial history of the United States, but to ensure that the structures Anderson encountered and

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<sup>16</sup>Ibid

<sup>17</sup>Byng, p. 709

<sup>18</sup>Brown, Kevin and Darrell D. Jackson. “The History and Conceptual Elements of Critical Race Theory” in *Handbook of Critical Race Theory in Education*. Marvin Lynn and Adrienne D. Dixon, eds. New York: Routledge, 2013, p. 14-17.

used throughout her life in relation to her musical activities are understood as participating in the maintenance of a racial hierarchy that has been part of this country for centuries.

The second tenet of critical race theory that will be used is *whiteness as property*, showcasing the functions of whiteness not only as a racial identity, but a legal, political, educational, and social currency which maintains the dominance of individuals racialized as white.<sup>19</sup> In her article “Whiteness as Property,” Cheryl Harris outlines three distinct and interlocking manifestations of this concept that operate together in the following ways: rights of disposition, right to use and enjoyment, and absolute right to exclude.<sup>20</sup> *Rights of disposition* involves the transference of the cultural and social constructs racialized as white onto racially and ethnically marginalized individuals while the dominating group maintains ownership of those constructs. *Right to use and enjoyment* addresses the privileges afforded white men and women within the legal structures, and *absolute right to exclude* allows for the white, dominating class to enact “the legal right to exclude others from the privileges inhering in whiteness,” also tying back to rights of disposition, which could be removed whenever necessary.<sup>21</sup>

This tenet will be most present in Chapter Two, which will feature an analysis of two filmed performances of Anderson from 1944 and the late 1940s-early 1950s. The racialization of classical music and its usage to reinforce ideas of cultural superiority by (white) cultural gatekeepers in American society is essential to understanding the ways audiences perceived Anderson to be performing and projecting manifestations of “whiteness,” when in actuality she was challenging the conception of classical music as inherently white, upper class, and

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<sup>19</sup>Harris, Cheryl. “Whiteness as Property” in *Critical Race Theory: The Key Writings that Formed the Movement*. Kimberlé Williams Crenshaw, Neil Gotanda, Gary Peller, Kendall Thomas, eds. New York: The New Press, 1995, pp. 276-291.

<sup>20</sup>Harris, p. 281-282

<sup>21</sup>Harris, p. 283

European. This portion of the paper aims to complicate the standard understanding of classical music as a “white” musical genre not only within the context of Anderson’s life, but in contemporary conceptualizations of classical music, which belies many communities of color that have participated in the creation and performance of this musical style for centuries.<sup>22</sup>

While Anderson possessed and maintained an active role in the development of her career, it cannot be ignored that in the context of the United States in the twentieth century, her mainstream success allowed for a few black American classical musicians to break the racial glass ceiling without bringing down the entire house. If Anderson’s interpretations were not received in a positive manner by white performers, conductors, critics, and pedagogues, it is highly unlikely that she would have become a major figure outside of black American communities. This shows that the development of whiteness functions primarily as a category to keep judicial and social control in the hands of those racialized as white.

The final tenet that will be applied is the *critique of liberalism*, which will serve as the framework for the final chapter. Through discussion of the limited potential of liberalist rhetoric and policy to enact systemic changes for racial equality, Chapter Three will first address the limited impact of the Lincoln Memorial Concert on desegregation and racial pluralism in American classical music venues and secondly, the political function of this event once it was viewed as the apex of Anderson’s musical career and an important contribution to the historical record. Intersecting with the tenets of historical context and whiteness as property, the critique of

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<sup>22</sup>André, Naomi, Karen M. Bryan, and Eric Saylor, eds. *Blackness in Opera*. Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2012; Floyd, Samuel A. “The Diasporas Concert Worlds: Europe and the Americas” in *The Transformation of Black Music: The Rhythm, the Songs, and the Ships of the African Diaspora*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2017, pp. 49–68; Southern, Eileen. *The Music of Black Americans: A History*, 3<sup>rd</sup> edition. New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1997; Wright, Josephine R. B. “Art/Classical Music” in *African American Music: An Introduction*. Mellonee V. Burnim and Portia K. Maultsby, eds. New York: Routledge, 2015, pp. 138–160.

liberalism in critical race theory shows the lack of structural engagement which prevents liberalist ideology and its implementation from successfully deconstructing racial inequality and inequity at the systemic level.<sup>23</sup> Though it is utilized as a social and political tool to remedy racial tension and racist policy, in reality it maintains white dominance through concepts such as universalism and color-blindness, inserting small numbers of people of color to present a faux multiculturalist equality. Due to its origins in intellectual thought that privileged the priorities of white, European upper class men, its mapping onto working class American priorities primarily provides superficial changes and improvements, a fact that has become more evident in our political climate of the past forty years.<sup>24</sup>

The impact of liberalist ideology on Anderson's career in the 1930s and 1940s will be best illustrated in discussion of the events that led to the Lincoln Memorial Concert. Anderson and the Constitution Hall controversy occurred amidst a decades long fear of communism and the political necessity for the United States to practice what it preached (i.e. liberty and equality for all its citizens) in the face of encroaching fascism. The political needs of the white political elite once again aligned with centuries long protests from Americans of color, creating an agenda grounded in liberalist rhetoric that allowed for black Americans like Anderson to maintain their mainstream symbolism and importance without upsetting the racial status quo. This is not to belittle the successful use of liberal ideology by activists such as Dr. King and others, but to reinforce the call of activists, citizens, and scholars who see that the realization of racial equality and equity requires radical methods that liberalism does not supply.

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<sup>23</sup>Bonilla-Silva, pp. 74-76.

<sup>24</sup>Bonilla-Silva, p. 75



As the tenets of historical context, whiteness as property, and the critique of liberalism will address the systems of power that Anderson interacted with, subverted, and sometimes upheld in American society, vocality will be used to understand how Anderson traversed societal expectations of her behavior, words, and ideas as a black woman in the public sphere. From racialized music expectations to racist assumptions of black women's "acceptable" manifestation of their gender identity, Anderson developed a deft balance between fitting an acceptable mold with which white audiences and critics were comfortable, while additionally challenging mainstream stereotypes of what constituted black femininity.

The concept of vocality used here draws heavily upon its application by ethnomusicologist Ana María Ochoa Gautier in her monograph, *Aurality: Listening and Knowledge in Nineteenth-Century Colombia*.<sup>25</sup> As Ochoa deconstructed the interpretation and categorization of vocal expressions in the construction of Colombian national identity, this paper will engage with American societal expectations and (mis) interpretations (conscious or unconscious) of black women's expressive capabilities in public spaces.<sup>26</sup> Anderson's vocal performances, interaction with her manager, and involvement in a musical style that was not considered a part of black American musical culture required control of how her public statements and aesthetic decisions would be interpreted by white critics and audiences. This possibility of misinterpretation required a strategic approach to how she responded to interview questions, or if she should make a statement at all. Though embraced as the "greatest voice of her generation," Anderson's racial identity as a black woman required certain vocal expressions outside of the recital stage that would not be viewed as "aggressive" or "divisive." The recital

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<sup>25</sup>Ochoa Gautier, Ana María. *Aurality: Listening and Knowledge in Nineteenth-Century Colombia*. Durham: Duke University Press, 2014

<sup>26</sup>Ochoa, p. 5

stage also contributed to this navigation of specific expectations tied to essentialist ideas of racial identity and racialized music, which illustrates the necessity of subtle approaches on the part of Anderson on the concert circuit.

The historiographic and theoretical study of the racialization of music has become an important area of study in academia, music education, and the work of scholar-performers.<sup>27</sup> Scholarship within sound studies, ethnomusicology, and musicology have contributed to growing theorizations of how musical genres, timbres, and other acoustic expressions have been and continue to be, racialized. Eidsheim's "Marian Anderson and 'Sonic Blackness' in American Opera," Karl Hagstrom Miller's *Segregating Sound*, Ana María Ochoa Guatier's *Aurality*, and Jennifer Lynn Stoeber's *The Sonic Color Line* are recent scholarly examples that utilize historical context, cultural, critical race, literary, and repertoire studies to address the development and societal impact of racialized music and sound that will provide a foundational resource for discussion of Anderson's vocality on and off the stage.<sup>28</sup>

Discussion of Anderson's vocality will explore the modes of expression she drew upon within her performances and other areas of her career. Her performance of art songs, arias, and spirituals jointly challenged and met preconceived notions of black musicality. Her programming of spirituals aligned with white American ideas of black musical and religious life yet pushed against assumptions that recital and concert halls were not the appropriate place for this genre to be performed and enjoyed by racialized "others." Programming *Lieder*, one of the most highly respected, praised, and difficult vocal genres in the Western classical music tradition, also

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<sup>27</sup>Radano, Ronald and Philip V. Bohlman, eds. *Music and the Racial Imagination*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2000.

<sup>28</sup>Eidsheim's "Marian Anderson and 'Sonic Blackness' in American Opera"; Miller, Karl Hagstrom. *Segregating Sound: Inventing Folk and Pop Music in the Age of Jim Crow*. Durham: Duke University Press, 2010; Ochoa Guatier, *Aurality: Listening and Knowledge in Nineteenth-Century Colombia*; Stoeber, Jennifer Lynn. *The Sonic Color Line: Race & the Cultural Politics of Listening*. New York: New York University Press, 2016.

challenged conceptions of not only who should perform that repertoire, but who *could* perform it. Whether Anderson wanted her performances to be viewed in this way or not (and many sources seem to indicate the latter), they directly challenged what white audiences were used to hearing and seeing when they attended classical music concerts and recitals, and set the standard for the programming of spirituals that have been staples of classical voice recitals in modern times.

These methods from critical race theory and the concept of vocality will be applied within an intersectional framework to thoroughly acknowledge the layers of oppression and privilege experienced by Anderson as a black American woman from a working class, black American family. The work of feminists and womanists such as Angela Davis, bell hooks, and Audre Lorde have expertly critiqued the universalizing, color-blind approaches of mainstream feminist movements that center the experiences of white, middle-upper class, cisgender women, critiques that are still numerous in contemporary feminist and womanist literature.<sup>29</sup> The ways Anderson's voice and career have been understood and utilized within a universalist context has impeded the complexity of Anderson's career from being thoroughly understood. It has also limited engagement with Anderson's career on her own terms, from her expression of activism to the impact of racism on her musical education and performances. Through application of methods used by scholars such as hooks and Lorde, these layers will be parsed to understand the larger implications of Anderson's vocality as she understood it, and its various interpretations and co-options by third parties.

Marian Anderson's life and career aligned with one of the most extensive waves of activism in the United States. But after 1955, the year of her debut with the Metropolitan Opera,

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<sup>29</sup>Davis, Angela Y. *Women, Race, and Class*. New York: Vintage Books, 1981, 1983. hooks, bell. *Feminist Theory: From Margin to Center*. New York: Routledge, 1984, 2015; Lorde, Audre. *Sister Outsider: Essays and Speeches*. Berkeley: Crossing Press, 1984, 2007.

she more or less disappears, fading into the ether as other historical figures gain prominence. Outside of the Lincoln Memorial Concert and narratives of integrationist activism in the 1930s and 1940s, she is rarely mentioned in the context of civil rights during this period. Anderson's political potency and technical ability had waned if not completely deteriorated by the height of the civil rights movements in the 1950s and 1960s, and her ideology regarding racial equality sat on the opposite side of the ideological foundations of the Black Arts and Black Power movements of the 1960s and 1970s. Also, her position as cultural ambassador on the part of the United States government following World War II, representing a nation that simultaneously acknowledged her artistic mastery and systemically marginalized black Americans, would be interpreted by some black Americans as a betrayal. Though she intended to assist with the new stage of civil rights activism and fight for racial equality, the methods she used, in conjunction with her artistic collaboration with the federal government, was perceived by some as aligning with the nation's projection of a united, racially tolerant society that masked the violent, terrifying reality in which most Americans of color lived. Anderson's vocality did not match the intensity of King's, Malcom X's, and the Southern Nonviolent Coordinating Committee's, an intensity that was erroneously interpreted as acceptance of the status quo.

The liberalist ideology that Anderson was co-opted for and which she decided to project and embody through her collaborations and performances was no longer effective. This does not diminish her contributions and what she came to symbolize (or to say civil rights activists did not successfully draw upon aspects of liberalism to amplify their work).<sup>30</sup> Rather, it reminds us of the complexity and limitations of individuals' best intentions and that there is not a single event

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<sup>30</sup>Bonilla-Silva, p. 75–76

or action that will lead to national or global systemic change.<sup>31</sup> I intend for this paper to be an entry to more complex narratives of Anderson, her contemporaries, and other black classical musicians, as well as a template for the increased understanding of the systemic structures that further perpetrate white dominance in classical music in contemporary and historical practices.

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<sup>31</sup>Bonilla-Silva, p. 75

## CHAPTER ONE

### Anderson's Vocality in Public and Private Space

*"I regret the necessity of writing...  
but honestly feel that it is the only  
right thing to do..."*

On January 28, 1939, Marian Anderson was tired. She had completed thirteen recitals between January 2<sup>nd</sup> and 27<sup>th</sup>, and had arrived in Indianapolis, Indiana via Rochester, New York to perform on the afternoon of the 29<sup>th</sup>.<sup>32</sup> This was not the first time she had two closely scheduled engagements hundreds of miles apart in her past four years as a musician represented by Sol Hurok. This was also not the first time she had objected to Hurok's scheduling of her performances. Her frustration and tolerance had reached its limit. Typed on the letterhead from her Claypool Hotel lodgings, Anderson reinforced that this scheduling practice was unsustainable:

Dear Mr. Hurok,

My experience from this tournee has already shown that the concerts with the long trips in between are too strenuously booked for me. Last year I said to your bureau, and seriously too, that it was a physical impossibility for me to properly sing a recital immediately after having spent two days in travel. This is exactly what happened last week in the dash from Grand Forks N.D. to Pittsburgh where we arrived the evening preceding the afternoon concert. (I enclose a criticism from Pittsburgh which unfortunately is true due to exhaustion.) Further I begged an easier arrangement for California this year in order that I might have a breathing spell before the following strenuous months, but against my wish two concerts on the heels of each other have been booked at the very beginning of the coast tour (February 9<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup>.) It is imperative as I said last year and as we understood upon the signing of the contract, that I have one day of rest between each concert and a good rest after a strenuous trip. I implore you Mr. Hurok, to inform your bureau that in the coming season if similar arrangements continue, I will be forced to give up such engagements. It is very evident that with an all too

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<sup>32</sup>Itinerary, 1938-1939. Marian Anderson Papers, University of Pennsylvania, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania.

strenuous program of concerts, my future career can not be “built up.” I regret the necessity of writing you such a letter but honestly feel that it is the only right thing to do under the circumstances. Yours very truly,

P.S. I am sending Miss Frohman a copy of this letter.<sup>33</sup>

A telegram from Mae Frohman on behalf of Hurok arrived for Anderson on February 11<sup>th</sup>. It is clear that Anderson’s position was taken seriously, as Frohman discusses the rescheduling of several long distance recitals for later in the season:

Fort Worth date changed to Sunday afternoon March 19. Syracuse changed to May 10. Trying to change Columbus [Ohio] to May but have not yet succeeded. Having difficulties changing Manchester as...only date acceptable...April 21 which means two concerts on successive days but very little railroading please advise...<sup>34</sup>

Such an exchange may seem innocuous: an artist is frustrated with her schedule, puts her foot down, and her management responds in kind. But this exchange between Anderson and her management and the swift action taken to address her concerns is important to consider within the context of race relations, systemic racism and sexism, and the labor of musical performers in the early-twentieth century United States. Anderson’s articulation of her dissatisfaction with her schedule is not only heard by Hurok and his management team, but provokes a response so that her needs and wishes are met, illustrating the power and influence she possessed in her professional relationship with her management.

This chapter will situate the above exchange within the meso and macro racial frameworks of the mid-late 1930s United States, discuss the roles of Anderson and Hurok in the marketing of her talent, and the labor involved to meet her contractual obligations. While Anderson did not achieve mainstream success until she signed with Hurok, such an encounter

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<sup>33</sup>Anderson, Marian. “Anderson writing to Sol Hurok,” letter, January 28, 1939. Marian Anderson Papers. University of Pennsylvania. Letter, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania.

<sup>34</sup>Frohman, Mae. “Frohman writes telegram to Marian Anderson,” telegram, February 11, 1939. Marian Anderson Papers. University of Pennsylvania, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania.

would not have happened without Anderson's observant and strategic courting of the artistic manager as she realized her representation under Arthur Judson was not nearly as financially or critically successful as she wanted.<sup>35</sup> Hurok's signing of Anderson to his management company was sometimes framed as a "progressive gamble" on his part, and while Anderson in later years would credit Hurok with her critical and financial success, it is clear that the professional relationship was not one sided. Hurok facilitated Anderson's introduction to white listeners of classical music, but Anderson maintained access to those spaces through her critical and financial success. It would be remiss to not consider their relationship a symbiotic one, each reliant on the other's success, talent, and connections. By discussing this interaction in the context of racism within the meso and macro levels of American society, I will illustrate how Anderson furthered and sustained her career, which has received limited engagement in the historiographic material on her life.

For a black classical vocalist in the early twentieth century United States to be represented by a major artistic manager is significant. However, this aspect of her career has overshadowed the fact that she participated in the growth of her mainstream success and that the power and influence in their professional relationship was not solely in Hurok's hands. Anderson's agency did not erase the oppressive racial and gender structures in her country. Instead, they illustrated the cultural and economic capital she acquired through her own labor *and* her representation by Hurok, which she was then able to apply when she disagreed with his decisions. Before discussion of the correspondence from 1937 and 1939, it is necessary to outline the historical context in which Anderson's vocality as a black woman emerged. The following section will situate Anderson's articulation of her issues with the close scheduling of long

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<sup>35</sup>Keiler, p. 135 – 137.



distance performances in the history of accepted and criticized manifestations of black female vocality in the United States.

### **Black Female Vocality**

The vocality of black Americans has occupied a fluctuating, but always precarious, position in American society. It may be embraced when packaged as a form of entertainment, largely ignored, criticized, or squashed when it starkly criticizes the discriminatory and marginalizing systemic structures of the United States. Because of this, black women and men have developed a multitude of strategies in music, the arts, and literary forms to articulate their concerns, hopes, terrors, and successes in nuanced ways. The subversive and political power of speaking, writing, and performing to combat limiting interpretations of individuals' identities, personalities, and cultural experiences, is a major contextual feature of black American musical history and collective memory. It was present in the music of enslaved men and women and twentieth century civil rights activists, two of many historical examples of music used by black Americans to challenge oppressive power structures in subversive or direct ways.<sup>36</sup> Discussions of black women's vocality in American society often engages with these musical and historical contexts, drawn upon and expounded on by black American authors, intellectuals, and activists such as Frederick Douglass, Toni Morrison, Gloria Naylor, and W.E.B. Dubois.<sup>37</sup> Angela Y. Davis' *Blues Legacies and Black Feminism: Gertrude "Ma" Rainey, Bessie Smith, and Billie Holiday* provides analysis of feminist articulations within the song lyrics recorded by Smith,

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<sup>36</sup>Southern, Eileen. *The Music of Black Americans: A History*, 3<sup>rd</sup> edition. New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1997

<sup>37</sup>Douglass, Frederick. *The Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass*. New York: Barnes and Noble Classics, 2003, c. 1845; Du Bois, W. E. B. *The Souls of Black Folk*. New York: Barnes and Noble Classics, 2003, c. 1903; Morrison, Toni. *Jazz*. 2004, c 1992; Naylor, Gloria. *Bailey's Café*. New York: Vintage Books, 1992.

Rainey, and Holiday, a foundational example of theoretical and cultural studies of black women's articulation and critique of the racist, misogynistic, and economically exploitative spaces in which they lived and worked.<sup>38</sup> Farah Jasmine Griffin's "When Malindy Sings: A Meditation on Black Women's Vocality" charts the development of two streams of the functionality of black women's vocality: 1) as representative of an oppressed and marginalized community and 2) as a symbol of a country moving closer towards racial healing, while proposing another "myth of origin" for the singing of black women in the United States, deconstructing its mythical uses for the spiritual awakening and realization of black American men.<sup>39</sup>

Griffin references Anderson's Lincoln Memorial Concert within the context of racial healing. While the reference is brief, it highlights a major political function that is applicable to the study of Anderson's entire career and interaction with white, mainstream American society. Anderson's financial and critical success was routinely lauded in the white and black presses, and with the Constitution Hall controversy, precipitated an increase of passionate critique of systemic segregation that fed her positioning as an American musical symbol that could assist the racial healing of the United States.<sup>40</sup> This manifestation of black women's vocality rarely enters the discourse in part because it does not align with current paradigms of black women's vocality in the United States.<sup>41</sup> This is not to diminish the importance of work by Griffin and

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<sup>38</sup>Davis, Angela Y. *Blues Legacies and Black Feminism: Gertrude "Ma" Rainey, Bessie Smith, and Billie Holliday*. New York: Vintage Books, 1998.

<sup>39</sup>Griffin, Farah Jasmine. "When Malindy Sings: A Meditation on Black Women's Vocality" in *Uptown Conversation: The New Jazz Studies*, ed. Robert O'Meally, Brent Hayes Edwards, Farah Jasmine Griffin. New York: Columbia University Press, p. 102–125.

<sup>40</sup>Griffin, p.102– 104.

<sup>41</sup>Ibid; Redmond, Shana. *Anthem: Social Movements and the Sound of Solidarity in the African Diaspora*. New York: New York University Press, 2013.

other scholars on this topic, but to call attention to the narrow social contexts in which black women's vocality is engaged with in American society. Anderson was and still is interpreted as a woman who used her "voice as a tool for racial healing."<sup>42</sup> The dominant interpretations of this fact unintentionally represent her as being carried along on a wave of change, when in actuality Anderson was a keenly active participant in the definition of her career as a musician and black American. It is important that the work on black women's vocality engage with its multiple expressions and political uses, even if those uses are problematic. It is necessary so that scholarly and public discourses may broaden the understanding of *how* and *why* black women utilize their talents and their words in their communities, professional fields, and nations of residence.

Another manifestation of black female vocality relevant to Anderson's life and career is present in ideologies of racial uplift, respectability politics, and activism by black American women to be acknowledged as women (i.e. feminine, delicate, tender) in the United States.<sup>43</sup> Each of these ideologies drew upon societal standards of white, (Anglo Saxon) upper and middle class female respectability that were developed in the mid-nineteenth century. Since the "cult of motherhood," the home as the dominant space for married women, and female fragility were presented as the domain of white, Anglo-Saxon upper (and then middle class) women, some black American women used the successful implementation of those attributes to exemplify their worth to be recognized and respected as women.<sup>44</sup> While black feminist, historical, and cultural scholarship of the late-nineteenth through early twenty-first centuries have illustrated the

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<sup>42</sup>Griffin, p. 104

<sup>43</sup>Bay, Mia. "The Battle for Womanhood is the Battle for Race: Black Women and Nineteenth – Century Racial Thought" in *Toward an Intellectual History of Black Women*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill Press, 2016, p. 76-77; Davis, Angela Y. *Women, Race, & Class*. New York: Vintage Books, 1983, c. 1981, p. 12

<sup>44</sup>Ibid

problematic, ethnocentric, and misogynistic underpinnings of such ideology, the cultural power of this discourse of womanhood and femininity was one of many tools used to challenge dominate ideas of black cultural inferiority and ability in the mid-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries.<sup>45</sup>

Anderson was raised in a working class household and did not marry until her 40s, but with the growth of her professional success and economic security, became part of the black middle-class and thus evocative of a middle-class black American woman. Her image, musical ability, and success provided a positive model for black Americans who aimed to achieve similar economic success. Yet this came with negative connotations, not only in the context of a modern scholar looking back at a specific historical period, but within Anderson's era. As Anderson challenged ideas of black women as inelegant, sexually promiscuous, and deviant individuals, the use of her vocality to disagree with Hurok in the context of their correspondence was permissible in private, but not in public. Her authority was acceptable on the stage (though, as with all performers, open to criticism by critics and reviewers) but not beyond, as a classical artist and a respectable black American woman. Black women have been integral political organizers and activists who acknowledged and came to terms with the dangerous repercussions of speaking out against systemic injustice in the United States since the early nineteenth century. But there are other black women who either challenged the system in more subdued ways due to the restrictions of their profession or were not willing to devote the rest of their years to a life of public activism.

Because of this, it is necessary to note that while articulation of dissatisfaction and direct disagreement with a white individual could be perceived as ungrateful or "overstepping" the

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<sup>45</sup>Bay, p. 88-89.

accepted racial boundaries, Anderson's intention to control how the public interpreted and understood her words and actions made it imperative that such disagreements such as the ones above would not be fodder for gossip or public shaming. Additionally, Anderson wanted to retain the separation of her public and private spaces, not an uncommon want for incredibly famous individuals. This persona of a quiet, amiable black woman may have been part of Anderson's shyness, but also because she was determined to maintain as much control as she could over how the public and critics viewed and understood her. Journalists and readers did not need to know the intricacies of what Anderson and Hurok did or did not agree on, not only because it might erroneously project a disingenuous idea of Anderson, but because it was none of their business.

But it is the business of historians, musicologists, and writers reflecting on and attempting to understand her life and contributions to American society. Anderson's role in the positioning of her career as an example of black creative possibility and racial inclusivity in mainstream America not only required a subtle manifestation of control due to the societally accepted manifestations of black women's vocality, but also because her division of public and private was very clear and rigid. She controlled and monitored the public's access to her private life and opinions, ensuring audiences knew nothing of those interactions.<sup>46</sup> Because her position in the mainstream would shift from respected vocalist to racial unifier thanks to the Lincoln Memorial Concert, her traditional handling of the press and fans was no longer permissible, a change she was hesitant to make.

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<sup>46</sup>Jones, Julia D. "Marian Anderson Recital Here A Big Triumph!..." *The Pittsburgh Courier*, April 17, 1937. ProQuest. <http://search.proquest.com/libproxy.lib.unc.edu/docview/202043272/fulltextPDF/16600C212A184C22PQ/2?accountid=14244> (Accessed May 11, 2017); "Marian Anderson's Luminous, Brown Eyes..." *The Pittsburgh Courier*, January 28, 1939. ProQuest. <http://search.proquest.com/libproxy.lib.unc.edu/docview/202051737/16600C212A184C22PQ/1?accountid=14244>. (Accessed May 11, 2017)

The union of Anderson's private life with its public impact is not unusual. Many black Americans' lives and societal contributions are viewed through the prism of the political, cultural, and societal problems that impact their lives. This results in the invisibility of the personal and private aspects of black Americans' lives, the only place possible for systemic problems to be placed to the side for the remainder of the day. Anderson not only desired but aimed to have both: to serve as a role model for black Americans while having a space where she could set aside that mantle and spend time with family and friends. She was not willing to give one up for the sake of the other, though it could be argued her aspects of her privacy had to be reduced with her new public role, one that had a larger significance than she had ever intended.

While this paper is not concerned with the private sphere of Anderson's life, her need for separation of the public and the private is a necessary point to highlight, and will be addressed continuously throughout this document. Anderson's crafting of her own space to live, laugh, argue, cry, and love with family, friends, and acquaintances away from the glare of the public, has a powerful significance in the context of the historiography of black Americans' lives. To own and enjoy a private space where racism, misogyny, classism, are not the primary focus of one's daily thoughts is a rare and precious thing. It was a rare opportunity for Americans of color in Anderson's time, and is still too often a rare opportunity for Americans of color in the twenty-first century.

I will now contextualize the above exchange between Anderson and her management and how she was marketed in the press to illustrate how Anderson, in conjunction with Hurok, navigated the racial restrictions placed on black American women through adherence and subversion of the racial status quo.

## **The Meso and Macro Manifestations of Anderson's Vocality**

To reiterate, the meso manifestation of racial difference, racism, and the resulting hierarchy are present within the variety of media Americans consume on a daily basis. It impacts ideas of racial interaction, authority, and power, all of which are applicable in presentations of the professional relationship between Anderson and Hurok. Multiple recital programs from Anderson's Carnegie Hall performances include Hurok's name proceeding her own, and while the type is not nearly as bold as Anderson's, the use of "Sol Hurok presents" enhances the artistic and critical legitimacy of Anderson's talent and interpretive abilities.<sup>47</sup>

The majority of her programs under the representation of Arthur Judson, while being represented by a major artistic manager, did not push this association nearly as aggressively as Hurok's did. The result was Anderson's skills were respected and praised due to the authorial opinion of an artistic manager who was racialized as white (Hurok had immigrated to the United States from Russia), and possessed political, social, and cultural capital. In addition to Anderson's marketing through association with his management, Hurok saw Anderson's large number of concerts as an effective method to ensure she would not be a short-lived national and international success.

Hurok's vision to keep Anderson relevant led to several clashes of opinion between the two. As noted previously, the 1939 exchange was not the first time Anderson and Hurok disagreed about the frequency of her performances. A telegram dated March 25, 1937 from Hurok to Anderson discussed the booking of an engagement in Ann Arbor, Michigan, to which Anderson responded, written on the back of the telegram, "Not Agreed Ann Arbor, March

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<sup>47</sup>Hurok, Sol. "Hurok sends message to Anderson care of Miss Isabel Scott," telegram, March 25, 1937. Marian Anderson Papers. University of Pennsylvania, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania.

twenty ninth.”<sup>48</sup> The following day another telegram arrived for Anderson from Hurok, in which he expounds on his reasoning for scheduling this performance. He writes a letter the same day, and this communication and the contents within challenge the misconception that Anderson exerted little to no influence on the scheduling of her performances season to season:

Dear Miss Anderson,  
I wish to explain more fully the telegram which I sent you to-day. The Ann Arbor committee telephoned me yesterday long distance and I accepted the date without hesitation for several reasons. Firstly, it is one of the finest musical cities in the country; their yearly May Music Festivals attract international attention and this May both Flagstad and Melchior are appearing there. When the opportunity presented itself, I naturally felt that this type of audience should hear you. Secondly, it is en route to Cincinnati which means that you can still spend the Easter week-end with your family. You probably feel that your schedule for April is rather heavy, but when one takes into consideration that for the most part the dates are postponements from January, that could not be avoided. You must believe, Miss Anderson, that we are all working toward one goal – to definitely place you among the highest ranking musical artists in this country to-day. Nothing should be done at this point to interrupt this. With all best wishes to you, I am

Sincerely yours, S. Hurok<sup>49</sup>

By this point, Anderson had performed as a Hurok artist for going on two years to critical and financial success, and while Hurok frames his decision to schedule the Ann Arbor performance in the best interests of Anderson’s long term career, his responding telegram belies the power Anderson possessed in the professional partnership, which the tone and detail of his letter from March 26<sup>th</sup> clearly illustrates. By this point, Anderson’s success and Hurok’s success are interwoven. As Hurok’s authority and position as a white, Russian-American man in the musical and artistic world contributed to white, mainstream America embracing Anderson, Anderson’s critical and financial success in the United States and Europe further solidified the respectability of the Hurok name. Losing Anderson as a client would affect him financially and culturally:

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<sup>48</sup>Ibid.

<sup>49</sup>Hurok, Sol. “Hurok to Marian Anderson,” letter, March 26, 1937. Marian Anderson Papers, University of Pennsylvania, Philadelphia Pennsylvania.



while it would not destroy his company, the cultural capital Anderson had developed would be transferred if she were to sign with another mainstream management company. Her continued success required representation by respected members of white, mainstream society; interactions at the micro level required hearing, acknowledging, and acting on Anderson's concerns and requests, but at the meso and macro levels, Hurok was the one who needed to be perceived as the one pulling and controlling the trajectory of Anderson's career.

Another example that illustrates the intersection of cultural capital possessed by Anderson and other systemic structures in classical music are advertisements for Anderson's recordings with Victor Records. They range from plain to detailed but typically include a promotional photo with descriptions of her musical ability. Anderson's image and talent were presented as an example of the fidelity and quality of Victor Records. With this partnership, Victor had another world-renowned star on their roster, which fostered the trust that a patron would receive the best quality when purchasing records, radios, and music players produced by the company. Several of the larger advertisements between 1937 and 1939, featured in her Carnegie Hall recital programs, contain a headshot of Anderson glancing over her shoulder, a gentle smile on her face. In this format, Hurok's name is not present, as it is now the authority of Victor Records that is collaborating with and reinforcing Anderson's ability. Anderson's program from her May 8<sup>th</sup> concert at Carnegie Hall in 1938 proclaims in bold print: "Hear America's Noted Contralto MARIAN ANDERSON on Victor Records," drawing upon her critical success and marketing her as a mainstream artist.<sup>50</sup> Any mention of her racial identity is absent from the glowing praise of the title announcement and the remainder of the

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<sup>50</sup>"Anderson recordings' on Victor Records advertisement," concert program, May 8, 1938. Marian Anderson Papers, University of Pennsylvania, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania.

advertisement.<sup>51</sup> The list of available recordings contained her most recent releases: Schubert's "Ave Maria" and "Der Tod Und Das Mädchen," "Go Down Moses," "My Soul's Been Anchored in the Lord," arranged by Florence Price, among several others.<sup>52</sup> Information on Victor's RCA Victor Phonograph-Radio, model U-106 is also included, situated as a new machine that buyers of Anderson's records may use to play the new additions to their music collection.<sup>53</sup>

Anderson's representation on advertisements for companies like Victor Records and Steinway pianos is indicative of the artistic capital she had acquired by this time. As a successful mainstream artist, her name, face, and voice would sell her recordings and the brand in question, congruently sustaining the legitimacy of that label while also benefiting from alignment with that particular company. The marketing of Anderson as "America's Noted Contralto..." devoid of any linguistic racial signifiers is also pertinent, as it suggests that Anderson is now not only mainstream but has "overcome" the barrier of race. Such a perspective was not uncommon in discussions of Anderson, or her own statements on her career. How this contributed to the liberal rhetoric of the pre – and post – WWII years in the United States will be more fully explored in Chapter Three, to illustrate how the notion of marginalized individuals' "overcoming" a racialized identity is simply a transference to the realm of a white, middle-upper class cultural ideal, achieved through application of whiteness as property, which will be addressed in more detail in Chapter Two. But before concluding this chapter, it is necessary to address one extant correspondence between Hurok and a hotel in which Anderson was scheduled to stay for a performance in Seattle, Washington.

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<sup>51</sup>Ibid

<sup>52</sup>Ibid

<sup>53</sup>Ibid

By February 17, 1937, Marian Anderson had been performing professionally for over ten years. Her recitals in the United States from 1935–1939 contained consistent bookings in major concert venues: Carnegie Hall in New York City, the War Memorial Opera House in San Francisco, and the Academy of Music in her hometown of Philadelphia, and she was viewed by members of the black and white presses as one of the world’s premier musical performers.<sup>54</sup> No longer was her success heavily reliant on the representation by Sol Hurok, Victor Records, or Steinway Pianos: American audiences trusted that a Marian Anderson recital was to be a spectacular event, a moment not to be missed, and that she was living proof of the classical music capabilities of black Americans and Americans of all colors and origins.

But Anderson’s mainstream laurels did not result in unencumbered access. On February 17<sup>th</sup>, the vice president of the Olympic Hotel in Seattle, Washington sent a letter to Sol Hurok regarding Anderson’s and her pianist, Kosti Vehanen’s, stay in early March. The letter is polite and to the point, containing typical details of a hotel confirmation, though one portion brings the reality of a segregated United States to the forefront : “It is understood that Miss Anderson will have all her meals served to her in her suite.”<sup>55</sup>

Hotel segregation in American society pre-1954 has been a major component of civil rights movement historiography, but what is lesser known is the existence of interracial hotels that contained segregationist practices in some areas of the hotel. Now, it must be noted that Anderson was an exceedingly private person, and has stated preference in eating privately during

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<sup>54</sup>“Marian Anderson Recital Presages Foreign Tour” in *Philadelphia Tribune* (Feb 20, 1936): 14. ProQuest Database.  
<http://search.proquest.com/libproxy.lib.unc.edu/docview/531409927/pageviewPDF/341A64B7FE8D47B7PQ/3?accountid=14244>. (Accessed March 23, 2017)

<sup>55</sup>“Olympic Hotel Correspondence to Sol Hurok Management,” letter, February 17, 1937. Marian Anderson Papers, University of Pennsylvania.

her travels.<sup>56</sup> However, it was not uncommon for American hotels and other businesses to allow interracial occupants or shoppers, yet strongly discouraged, if not outright banned, interracial dining in their restaurants. Anderson's comfort in dining alone may have been cultivated due to this societal practice, though she recognized she could make a complaint and be afforded the courtesy of eating in the hotel restaurant.<sup>57</sup> It is impossible to know for certain. What is clear is that in spite of her associations with major figures in the classical music sphere, and her own cultural power, Anderson was still limited due to the macro manifestations of racism that allowed for hotel and venue managers to decline their services for lodging and performances, without financial or moralistic implications. This is just one of many incidents Anderson encountered throughout her life that illustrate her handling of racialized spaces at the macro level, where her presence might be permitted in (most) concert halls, but not necessarily in other areas of American life.

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<sup>56</sup>Anderson, p. 244

<sup>57</sup>Ibid

## CHAPTER TWO

### Anderson and the Racialization of Classical Music

*“No one who has been to an Anderson concert can forget her compelling presence the second she appears on stage and the complete command of the audience comes to her without any conscious effort to achieve it.”*<sup>58</sup>

The most well-known filmed performance of Marian Anderson is her recital on Easter Sunday, May 9, 1939 on the steps of the Lincoln Memorial. Standing before a collection of microphones, eyes closed in nervous concentration, Anderson opened with “My Country ‘tis of Thee,” a piece that has become as important to her career narrative as the concert itself.<sup>59</sup> But there are several more filmed performances of Anderson, a significant number recorded after the Lincoln Memorial Concert. One features Anderson with conductor Leopold Stokowski in 1944, collaborating after a previous attempt fell through in the late ‘20s.<sup>60</sup> A 20 – minute biography made in 1950 features clips with staged informal scenes and filmed rehearsals and recitals, the

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<sup>58</sup>The Newsreel Archive. “Marian Anderson, 1950.” *YouTube*. [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UfLvusKNU7U&list=PLhJh3vZTgexMh6yQ\\_Zk4UBRILsLcAvwqN&index=1](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UfLvusKNU7U&list=PLhJh3vZTgexMh6yQ_Zk4UBRILsLcAvwqN&index=1), (Accessed March 28, 2017)

<sup>59</sup>Penn Libraries. “Marian Anderson – Two Miscellaneous Videos.” *YouTube*. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xdWJnKNIYpM&list=PLzZU4wLJ2MjtbCHmboWqROp7X2CQmt0Za&index=3>. (Accessed April 25, 2017)

<sup>60</sup>“Leopold Stokowski and Marian Anderson (complete video): Ave Maria, Come All Ye Faithful, Silent Night” *YouTube*. [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ne2C9J41sTg&list=PLhJh3vZTgexMh6yQ\\_Zk4UBRILsLcAvwqN&index=6](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ne2C9J41sTg&list=PLhJh3vZTgexMh6yQ_Zk4UBRILsLcAvwqN&index=6). (Accessed March 28, 2017); Keiler, p. 400

performance format in which she was most comfortable.<sup>61</sup> This film features a performance of the last verse from Schubert's "Ave Maria."<sup>62</sup>

Discussion of these filmed performances will explore how Anderson's vocality and presentation from 1944 and the 1950 documentary aligns and subverts the presentation of black women's vocality in classical music and demonstrate how she challenged and reinforced the racialization of this genre as white within the framework of the whiteness as property tenet of critical race theory. The 1944 performance with Stokowski will be discussed within the context of right to use and enjoyment, and right to exclude within the concept of whiteness as property. The performance of "Ave Maria" from the 1950 documentary will be discussed in the context of the rights of disposition, while also subverting this racialized and classist process on the recital stage.

### **Black Vocality and the Racialization of Classical Music: A Short History**

Anderson's career as a classical vocalist did not emerge in a vacuum. Her exposure to art songs and African American religious vocal music was a musical education part of a decades-old culture of classical music in black American communities. Classical music performance, education, and patronage in the United States saw a growth in the nineteenth century. The founding of professional orchestras and immigration of major European musicians expanded American's access to classical music teachers, composers, and performers.<sup>63</sup> Implementation of

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<sup>61</sup>"Marian Anderson, 1950."

<sup>62</sup>Ibid.

<sup>63</sup>Schenbeck, Lawrence. *Racial Uplift and American Music: 1878-1943*. Jackson: The University of Mississippi, 2012, pp. 41-44.

classical music in the public school curriculum, and uses of classical music as a tool for cultural and moral improvement also contributed to the development of American classical music.<sup>64</sup> For black Americans during this period, the access to black (and the few interracial) colleges and universities, support from black churches, community members, and established musicians, facilitated the creation of spaces for black American classical musicians to study, compose, and perform in a nation that practiced de jure and de facto segregation.<sup>65</sup>

This racial stratification between black and white Americans was further enforced by the passage of Jim Crow laws in Southern states and theorizations of human origin and difference in developing academic fields that legitimized racist and misogynist practices at the social and political level.<sup>66</sup> The association of racial identity with geography, temperament, intelligence, and culture by scholars in phrenology, history, and anthropology, were eventually applied to studies and theorizations of musical style and tradition.<sup>67</sup> Music critics, musicologists, and ethnomusicologists often furthered these restrictive ideas through their writing on the musical cultures of people of color, lending “objective” evidence of inferiority along lines of race, gender, and class.<sup>68</sup> Due to the racialization of musical styles, classical music has been firmly woven with ideas of white cultural, economic, and moral superiority since the late nineteenth century.<sup>69</sup> Because classical music was still seen as the prevue of the “Old Country,” Americans

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<sup>64</sup>Miller, pp. 159–166.

<sup>65</sup>Southern, pp. 223, 227–231.

<sup>66</sup>Ochoa, pp.43–50; Miller, p. 95.

<sup>67</sup>Miller, pp. 4–6.

<sup>68</sup>Ochoa, pp. 44–46.

<sup>69</sup>Miller, p 163.

needed to craft their classical music culture in the manner of their older and wiser musical colleagues across the pond. The writings of music critics, academics, and pedagogues such as Lowell Mason and J.S. Dwight looked to developing classical music canon of European composers and performance practices to legitimize what they saw as the nascent American communities of classical music study and performance.<sup>70</sup> These ideologies, combined with the growth of the record industry in the early twentieth century, resulted in the increased racial division of music styles and the marketing of classical music as a method for cultural uplift and moral improvement of the working class (non-Anglo Saxon or Germanic) white American populace.<sup>71</sup>

As Miller addresses in *Segregating Sound*, the functionality of cultural uplift, and in turn dissemination of classical music, was not viewed as applicable to American communities of color.<sup>72</sup> The use of cultural and racial uplift by black Americans and black classical musicians, while not without its problematic aspects, was a potent tool in challenging the narrative that classical music was only performed and created by white European and American men. Anderson's career pre-1939 contributed to this opposition. Though she had no intention to craft a political career, she did recognize the significance of her mainstream success for members of the black community.<sup>73</sup> For young black men and women to see someone that looked like them excel at their craft and be respected for it by members of black and white America was one of

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<sup>70</sup>Schenbeck, pp. 42–44

<sup>71</sup>Gustafson, Ruth Iana. *Race and curriculum: Music in childhood education*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009, pp. xiv–xv, 113

<sup>72</sup>Miller, p. 163

<sup>73</sup>Anderson, p. 304



few public examples of what black Americans could achieve in spite of social and legal restrictions along racial lines.

Not only was Anderson one of many black Americans who moved up the economic ladder to a comfortable life as a member of the middle class, but she was also one of many black American women to study and build careers within the classical music tradition. The recorded history of black classical vocalists in the United States often begins with Elizabeth Greenfield Taylor, an enslaved black American woman trained in the classical style and whose recitals in the mid-nineteenth century drew a mixture of awe, disbelief, and ridicule from white audiences and critics.<sup>74</sup> The careers of Sissieretta Jones and Harry T. Burleigh bridged the turn of the twentieth century and illustrated the variety of venues in which black classical musicians performed and challenged conceptions of repertoire featured on classical voice recitals.<sup>75</sup> Anderson's performance of arrangements of spirituals by Burleigh was a continuation of Burleigh's own programming practices.<sup>76</sup> This decision by Burleigh and Anderson set the precedent for spirituals on classical voice recitals. They both showed that study, critical engagement, and technical control were not only for the works of canonical composers like Brahms, Sibelius, and Schubert, but also for black American composers like Florence Price, R. Nathaniel Dett, and Hall Johnson.<sup>77</sup>

While classical music is still viewed and presented as an old tradition that has been (and still is) tied to the white, upper and middle class American experience, the careers and decisions

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<sup>74</sup>Eidsheim, p. 648, 651

<sup>75</sup>Snyder, Jean. *Harry T. Burleigh: From the Spiritual to the Harlem Renaissance*. Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2016; Eidsheim, p. 652.

<sup>76</sup>Southern, p. 271; Snyder, pp. 304–305.

<sup>77</sup>Snyder, p. 169

of Anderson, Burleigh and many others demonstrated that this history is much more diverse and complicated than is often presented. Classical music's association with whiteness as conceived in American society is not the result of nature but cultural and theoretical constructions of what constitutes a person's or a people's musical tradition within an unequal and inequitable hierarchy of dominance and submission. I will now turn to Anderson's performances to illustrate this intersection of constructed whiteness in classical music and how Anderson appeared to adhere to these constructions while simultaneously subverting and disputing them.

### **Right to Use and Enjoyment, Right to Exclude: Anderson and Stokowski – 1944**

The collaboration of Anderson and Leopold Stokowski in 1944 was part of a short film for distribution amongst the US Armed Forces during the Christmas season.<sup>78</sup> Sponsored by the Army Pictorial Service and titled "Christmas 1944," it featured Anderson performing Schubert's "Ave Maria" with Stokowski and an unidentified orchestra, followed by Stokowski conducting the Westminster Choir on the songs "Silent Night," "Oh Come All Ye Faithful," and "Hark the Herald Angels Sing," with a surprise performance of "Jingle Bells." The performance of Anderson juxtaposed with the Westminster Choir presents two intended functions of the film: the first is to provide American soldiers access to a performance by a critically acclaimed American artist and the second is a moment of communal singing of Christmas carols, evidenced by the inclusion of each carols' lyrics at the bottom of the screen.<sup>79</sup>

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<sup>78</sup>"Marian Anderson in Army's Xmas Motion Picture" in New York Amsterdam News, City Edition, New York, N.Y. [November 25, 1944]: 4A. ProQuest. <http://search.proquest.com.libproxy.lib.unc.edu/docview/225981378?pq-origsite=summon>. (Accessed March 4, 2017)

<sup>79</sup>"Leopold Stokowski and Marian Anderson (complete video): Ave Maria, Come All Ye Faithful, Silent Night."

Anderson's performance of "Ave Maria" is the first musical selection on the video, panning out from a solo harpist to focus on Anderson and Stokowski. Stokowski is positioned to the right and slightly behind Anderson. The staging of Anderson, Stokowski, the orchestra, and the choir (though they do not perform on this selection) allows for dynamic framing of the shot, rather than a reproduction of how these individuals would be positioned on the stage of a concert hall. It likely addressed any possible issues of balance between Anderson and the orchestra, but most importantly heightened the intimacy of the performance by putting Anderson in the foreground.

For the first few phrases of "Ave Maria," Anderson's gaze is focused upward, looking above the focus of the camera, as if slightly unsure whom she should be singing to. This changes as she slightly moves her head and engages with the music, and with the first edit her gaze is breaking the fourth wall by looking directly at the intended viewers. While shattering the illusion that the people onscreen are not aware of their viewers, in this context the dissolution of the fourth wall does not unsettle the audience member, but connects her to Anderson and the emotional impact of her performance. She is singing to her audience, singing to the American soldiers watching the film and connecting them to an experience that not all of them will be able to enjoy upon their return home. Anderson only speaks a few words in the film. At the conclusion of her performance she, shaking Stokowski's hand says, "Thank you. And God bless you all," before leaving the stage.<sup>80</sup>

On the surface, Anderson's participation in this project would undoubtedly be interpreted as a famous and consummate artist lending her talent to the moral support and sustenance of the American military during a time of war. Expressions of patriotism during World War II by black

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<sup>80</sup>Ibid

Americans, from serving in the army to supporting the war through rationing, providing monetary support, and encouraging morale, as Anderson did, aimed to illustrate the position of black women and men as citizens of the United States, and thus deserving of the civil rights that were systemically denied them.<sup>81</sup> The continuation of racial terrorism, disenfranchisement, and economic exploitation against black American servicemen and women and their communities at the conclusion of the Second World War was indicative of the larger societal structures upheld by (white) politicians, businessmen and women. Prominent figures in public discourses on race and racial equality were often comfortable and supportive of interracial collaboration only when it served the needs and wants of those societal structures, and in turn the individuals who benefited from those structures. The inclusion of white women and women of color in jobs previously dominated by men during the Second World War and the increased presence of women and men of color in the United States military met the nation's need for a large, well-trained fighting and working force to supply materials for the defense of the nation. Expansion of opportunity was allowed because it aligned with the defense of the country, democracy, and the Free World.<sup>82</sup>

Anderson's collaboration with Stokowski and the United States Army would not have been possible without her mainstream success and position as a racial unifier in the progression towards an integrated society due largely in part to the Lincoln Memorial Concert and the vocal support of First Lady Eleanor Roosevelt. The right to use and enjoyment and the right to exclude in whiteness as property is at play here in the following ways: though Anderson is not excluded

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<sup>81</sup>Fausser, Annegret. *Sounds of War: Music in the United States during World War II*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2013, p. 232.

<sup>82</sup>Kersten, Andrew E. "African Americans and World War II" in *OAH Magazine of History*, Vol. 16, No. 3 (Spring 2002), pp. 13–17

from contributing her artistry for servicewomen and men stationed overseas during the holiday season, her presence would not have been permitted if her public persona even hinted at disagreement with the mission of the war or criticism of the US government. If Anderson commented on the racial injustices of the nation in the method of Ida B. Wells, W. E. B. Du Bois, or Sojourner Truth, she would not have been one of the featured artists in the Christmas Army film.<sup>83</sup> Her voice would not be considered a force of healing but of division, which was the last thing a nation needed during a major military campaign halting the progress of major fascist powers systematically oppressing and killing their own people.

The proprietary uses of whiteness as a mode to exclude is also present in the limited presence of Anderson in the film. Though her performance opens the Christmas motion picture and is clearly the highlight of the picture, she only participates on one selection, and in comparison to her colleague Stokowski, speaks very little outside of her vocal performance. Her performance with a prominent white conductor, an all-white choir and (apparently an) all-white orchestra simultaneously presents an interracial collaboration, a rare occurrence, while retaining white dominance and systemic authority. Perhaps having Anderson participate in a sing-a-long was viewed as beneath her ability as a professional musician. But it also reads, at an individual level, that the integration trumpeted and heralded by some white and black Americans in the face of encroaching fascism and communism was not as equitable as they liked to believe. Interracial collaboration was now permitted, but at the end of the day, people needed to return to their specific, raced, spaces. They needed to return to their “place.”

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<sup>83</sup>Du Bois, *The Souls of Black Folk*; Truth, Sojourner. *Narrative of Sojourner Truth*. New York: Barnes & Noble Classics Series, 2005; Wells, Ida B. *The Light of Truth: Writings of an Anti-Lynching Crusader*. New York: Penguin Classics, 2014.

Which makes Anderson's performance in the framework of right to use and enjoyment all the more sinister. The exploitative enjoyment of black music by white listeners who devalue the black women, non-binary individuals, and men who create it is nothing new in American musical history. This issue has been commented on, criticized, and analyzed by listeners, musicians, activists, and academics throughout the past century.<sup>84</sup> In the context of Anderson's collaboration with Stokowski and the U.S. Army, she is allowed in this predominately white space, but only for a limited time, to present a moment of racial cooperation and (white) benevolence without giving up power and control, a foundation of racial segregation. This is not to say that Anderson did not see eye to eye with the morale boosting patriotism and nostalgia for home that this film aimed to convey. Instead, the enjoyment of Anderson's performance of "Ave Maria" by (white) servicemen and women did not require their recognition of Anderson as a black woman who was their equal, but a musician who was performing for their benefit and entertainment. The empathy and emotional connection ended there.

This does not make Anderson an unwilling/naïve pawn within this part of the racialized society in which she lived and worked. Especially after the Lincoln Memorial Concert, Anderson recognized the importance of her symbolic role as racial unifier, one of many important mantles she would hold throughout her career and patronage of the arts and pre-professional musicians. Her collaboration with the U.S. Army in 1944 was one of many that extended into the following decades. While this close association would not translate into the required actions and networking of the civil rights movement of the 1950s and 1960s, Anderson's presence did chip away at the white dominance within this film. A musically adept, beautiful, elegant black American woman singing in the foreground of multiple white musicians was a powerful, moving

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<sup>84</sup>Schenbeck, pp. 131–132; Miller, pp 80–84.

image. It may have crafted an image of American racial unity that was still decades away, a black woman allowed a portion of space by white gatekeepers. But it also illustrated that a black woman had retained that space where black Americans were rarely featured in such a respectful way. And it must be remembered that white servicemen and women were not the only ones watching.

### **Rights of Disposition and Commanding the Stage: Anderson – 1950**

The performance of Schubert's "Ave Maria" closes the 20-minute film on Marian Anderson from 1950. The narrative of the film combines and recreates past and current moments of her life: her American debut as a Sol Hurok artist in 1935 at New York's Town Hall, her ankle injury before the performance, her family members, moments of relaxation, and preparing to return to the touring circuit. The combination of performances in public and private contexts, imagery of her mother, her home (Marianna Farms), and Anderson at work and leisure on her property create an image of her middle – class life that is clearly crafted to speak to white American viewers, but which also showcases a talented black American woman in control of her private sphere, her public persona, and her interpretive music choices. The following section will engage with her performance of Schubert's "Ave Maria" in the framework of rights of disposition in conjunction with how she undermines aspects of classical music discourse that present the genre as evocative of whiteness.

Rights of disposition in the context of classical music are connected to the racialization of classical music as a white (middle and upper class) musical genre. As Harris explains, disposition addresses the application of political, cultural, and societal aspects that have been

racialized as white onto individuals outside of that category.<sup>85</sup> The result is political and cultural authority that may be recognized for as long or as short as those (white) individuals who control the public discourses and systemic structures desire. For black women classical musicians, particularly vocalists, the disconnect between viewing a black body producing a specific repertoire in a stylistic manner considered the domain of white European (often Germanic) women and men was palpable for many reviewers and observers of Anderson and her contemporaries.<sup>86</sup>

Hurok's awareness of this cognitive dissonance white audiences and critics would experience and the culturally entrenched assumption that classical music was "outside" of the black American experience is present in the marketing campaign for Anderson in the late 1930s. Within a promotional program on Anderson printed in advance of the 1938-1939 season, Anderson's race, while referenced in a biographical context, received few references in the reviews included within the pamphlet. A quote from a *New York Times* article from her 1935 Town Hall performance acknowledges Anderson's race, but foregrounds her ability and talent in the majority of the column:

The Negro contralto who has been abroad for four years established herself in concert at the Town Hall last night as the possessor of an excelling voice and art...The simple facts are better than superlatives...Fact one...the magnificence of the voice itself considered as a musical instrument. It is a contralto of a stunning range and volume, managed with suppleness and grace...Fact two should be Miss Anderson's musicianship. In a program that encompassed a full group of Haendel, another by Schubert, a Verdi aria, a Finnish selection and a concluding group of Negro spirituals, she revealed a penetrating command of style. She understood not only the difference in approach between the songs...but the divergences of intent in music by the same composer. Each song was treated as an artistic unit, set forth with care, study and intelligence.<sup>87</sup>

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<sup>85</sup>Harris, pp. 281–282

<sup>86</sup>Eidsheim, p. 659

<sup>87</sup>“The New York Times on Marian Anderson” Marian Anderson Promotional Program. Marian Anderson Papers, University of Pennsylvania, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania.



Including reviews that discussed Anderson's musical talent explicitly tied it to her interpretive knowledge, training, and experience touring on the European continent. This article positions Anderson as a performer who deserves the praise and attention of American audiences, illustrates how she was presented by critics and reviewers to appeal to predominately white classical music audiences, and was positioned as a respected interpreter of a musical style that was considered "culturally outside" of her assumed cultural experience. Paradoxically, this framing of Anderson's performance did not preoccupy itself with her assumed racial authenticity as a black musician *because* classical music was racialized and regionally associated with the white, European (and American) experience. This also allowed for white audiences, listeners, and critics to enjoy and acknowledge her musicality and the musicality of other black classical vocalists like Roland Hayes and Dorothy Maynor without destabilizing essentialist ideas on racialized music styles and traditions.

Which brings us to Anderson's performance of "Ave Maria" in 1950. I will stress that this portion of the discussion is not to further ideas of classical music or classical vocal style and technique as inherently white, but to showcase how Anderson's presence in this musical tradition and interpretive decisions were respected and heralded by specific white gatekeepers (Hurok, Carnegie Hall) that could be removed when it met their interests (and sometimes denied as with the Constitution Hall controversy).

The documentary film on Anderson's life features several filmed performances, all containing shots of white audience members. Besides the segment on Anderson's childhood, which features her mother, Anna Anderson, there are very few black Americans present within the film besides Anderson herself. The time given to the creation of this film by white creative individuals for an audience assumed to be white, is part of the rights of disposition that are at

play: Anderson's talent, economic viability, and work as an artistic ambassador for the American government, brought with it respect and authority that was consciously and unconsciously applied to white middle-upper class American men (and sometimes women).

The performances and personal moments in the film present Anderson as a woman who is not "limited" by her racial identity and has achieved professional success and domestic comfort. She is presented as living a comfortable, successful life. She is living the American dream as delineated by the filmmakers through their framing of what Anderson's audiences look like and the narrative of her early life growing up in a black working class family. While black Americans had been part of the middle and upper classes for close to a century by this time, and had reached a significant size by the 1950s, the manifestation of whiteness as property positioned the components of American middle class life as the domain of Americans that were not racialized, or "limited by their color."<sup>88</sup> This erroneously positioned middle class life in the United States as the domain of white Americans and required Americans of color to "leave behind" their racial identity (though they would not become "white") and become part of the implied non-racial space. The respectability that Anderson projected on stage and which she portrayed in the filmed portions of her private life is tied to this cultural assumption. Anderson as a middle class black woman was respected because she aligned with dominating ideas of appropriate decorum for middle class Americans, and illustrated how Americans of color were allowed into areas of life often restricted if they fit the mold to represent state sanctioned national ideals and identity.

The performance of "Ave Maria" contributes to this framing of specific middle class signifiers as the prevue of (white) Americans due to the racialization of the recital hall space.

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<sup>88</sup>Durant Jr., Thomas J. and Joyce S. Loudon. "The Black Middle Class in America: Historical and Contemporary Perspectives" in *Phylon*, Vol. 47, No. 4 (4<sup>th</sup> Quarter, 1986): pp 254–255.

Though implied to be an apolitical, neutral location for the enjoyment of high art, its dominance by economically-secure white Americans became a tool of racial, cultural, and national reinforcement of unequal hierarchies. The political uses of the recital hall in American race relations highlights the ways Anderson is sometimes performing “white” musical expressions through her stylistic delivery. Yet there are some specific aspects in these two clips that showcase how Anderson challenges this implied performance or alignment with whiteness as a classical musician, several aspects which require comparison with the 1944 performance with Stokowski for the United States Army.

Though her vocal ability was capable for the operatic stage (withstanding the lack of extensive roles for her vocal range) and she received several offers to perform with opera companies during her 1930s European tour, Anderson saw herself as a recitalist, and the difference between her countenance in 1944 and 1950 in her performance of “Ave Maria” is striking.<sup>89</sup> Compared to 1944, Anderson is an artist at ease in her environment. As noted by the narrator proceeding her performance of “Oh What a Beautiful City”: “No one who has been to an Anderson concert can forget her compelling presence the second she appears on stage and the complete command of the audience comes to her without any conscious effort to achieve it.”<sup>90</sup>

The compelling presence and command is overt before Anderson speaks the first syllable of the final verse of the song. Her phrasing of the first verse illustrates her solid technique through the seamless connection between each line, dynamic contrast between phrases, and dynamic build to the apex of the phrase before the final utterance of “Ave Maria.” Her voice is strong and subtle in comparison to the volume in the 1944 clip; while possibly a result of

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<sup>89</sup>“Marian Anderson, 1950”; Cheatham, pp. 168–171

<sup>90</sup>“Marian Anderson, 1950”

different microphones and staging (the 1950 version only features the final verse and is staged as if she is performing the song in its entirety), the posture and vocal projection of Anderson in the 1944 clip is much less assured and comfortable than the one from 1950. In both contexts she is theoretically performing for a predominately white audience, yet the later film features Anderson not only in an environment in which she was most comfortable, but where she was the primary interpreter and aesthetic authority in the performance of her music. In the Army Christmas motion picture, she had to engage with Stokowski's conception of the interpretation with a large number of (white) musicians, which meant her thoughts would not always be prioritized or even used. As a recitalist, it is Anderson and the pianist, in this instance Franz Rupp, who must rehearse, discuss, argue, and compromise with their interpretive and aesthetic decisions. The importance of collaborative exchange between soloist and pianist and other iterations of small music ensembles and groups was another space in which Anderson's creative ideas and agency could be articulated and incorporated once it reached the public sphere.

The combination of power, subtlety, emotion, and elegance in her performance met expectations of white audiences, who then enhanced the cultural and musical capital she had acquired from these communities for the past fifteen years. But these films also present the pushback against this white authority within this space: Anderson's vocal ability and interpretations were appreciated *and* respected. She performed in world-renowned concert and recital halls for white, black, and interracial audiences throughout her professional life, eventually refusing to perform in venues that practiced segregated seating.<sup>91</sup> If one had a chance to see Marian Anderson live, you ought to make sure you had the time and the money to see one of the consummate artists of the twentieth century.

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<sup>91</sup>Keiler, p. 259

While it is necessary to understand the ways Anderson was permitted to participate in the performance of classical music in predominately white spaces, it is just as important, if not more so, to understand how her very presence and continued success “chipped away” at the racial dominance of white Americans and Europeans within classical music. While she would not consider herself an activist and never referred to herself as such,, her presence, success, repertoire selections, and her command of the stage, were important in challenging white Americans’ ideas of classical music performers and exemplified the musical variety within black American culture. However, as will be covered in the final chapter, the progressive politics in which Anderson was swept up in before and after the Lincoln Memorial Concert had a limiting effect on discussion of integration in classical music spaces and communities. Just as civil rights required the fight for legal protections instead of catering to peoples’ moral center, the work of Anderson in diversifying American society and classical music required a more direct and long term approach.

## CHAPTER THREE

### The Lincoln Memorial Concert and the Limits of Liberalism

*“I had become, whether I liked it or not,  
a symbol, representing my people.  
I had to appear.”<sup>92</sup>*

On August 28<sup>th</sup> 1963, the steps and mall of the Lincoln Memorial were packed. Not due to visitors and tourists, but because thousands of American citizens had marched and gathered before the memorial of the sixteenth president of the United States in support of civil rights, worker’s rights, and calls for the end of government sanctioned racial segregation. A podium was set up on the memorial’s steps and shared by a number of speakers and performers. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr, James Baldwin, Mahalia Jackson, and Harry Belafonte, were just four of the influential women and men who were involved in this march, their images memorialized through photos, the words of King the soundtrack of this event and civil rights activism of the 1950s and 1960s. But there was another major figure whose presence and performance have become minimized in discussions of the March on Washington, yet is important in the context of the political uses of her career.

Marian Anderson’s Lincoln Memorial Concert in 1939 was not the final time she would perform at that location. Anderson’s fundraiser for the Freedom Fund in 1963 was attended by Roy Wilkins, the executive director of the NAACP. As one of the core organizers of the March on Washington, Wilkins saw the symbolic potential of Anderson’s participation and later

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<sup>92</sup>Anderson, p. 189

extended to her an invitation to perform at the March later that year.<sup>93</sup> While Anderson would not be the sole focus, her presence was intended to connect the call for desegregation in the rhetoric of the Lincoln Memorial Concert with the continued work for desegregation and legal protection by civil rights activists that had reached the forefront of the nation's consciousness in the 1950s and 1960s. Though racial equality had shown little improvement in the roughly 20-year span, the optimism of the 1939 Lincoln Memorial Concert was intended by Wilkins and Anderson to be transferred to the invigorated calls for justice from individuals and groups like Dr. King, the Southern Nonviolent Coordinating Committee, and the Southern Christian Leadership Conference.

But it did not work as planned. Anderson did perform on the steps of the Lincoln Memorial that day, but the powerful and passionate response from nearly thirty years before was not repeated. Due to the enormous attendance, she did not make it to the podium in time to perform the Star Spangled Banner, but sang "He's Got the Whole World in His Hands" once she'd arrived and regained her composure.<sup>94</sup> Response was polite, yet her presence no longer had the power and urgency of a few decades before. Between 1939 and 1963, Anderson had not only become a powerful and symbolic presence in the fight for racial equality and integration, but had also become evocative of the limitations of integrationist and colorblind ideology. Her performances, outreach, and programming challenged ideas of black musicality and artistry and brought attention to segregated seating practices in music venues. But in the realm of systemic political change, her approaches did not contain the urgency or criticism of her contemporaries.

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<sup>93</sup>Keiler, p. 309–310

<sup>94</sup>Keiler, p. 310

Issues of style and repertoire might have played a role. Anderson was known for performing spirituals, but they were often (if not always) arranged as art songs, and her primary training as a classical vocalist brought a performance practice that was not aligning with the strategic usage of black and African diasporic social and cultural knowledge by politically active black Americans.<sup>95</sup> Spirituals performed in the style of art songs were no longer viewed as an effective musical tool to challenge systemic oppression, while freedom songs and spirituals performed in the stylistic traditions of black American worship became a useful political method to communicate cultural memory as part of black Americans' demands that the US government rectify their practice of racial oppression.<sup>96</sup>

The rhetoric of Anderson's reflections, particularly later in life, on the political and cultural ramifications of her life and career suggest a grounding in the ideology of colorblindness and universalism, though her decisions regarding programming and recital venues reflect a keen awareness of challenging racial segregation and discrimination.<sup>97</sup> However, components of liberalism like colorblindness and universalism do not fully challenge the systemic racial dominance and discrimination affecting Americans of color, but rather allow for inclusion of a select few within mainstream spaces dominated by Americans who possess racial, cultural, and economic capital.<sup>98</sup> Thus, neighborhoods, schools, and other public arenas have some racial diversity, but individuals who are part of the (white) power structure do not have to give up their privilege and authority in those spaces.<sup>99</sup>

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<sup>95</sup>Southern, p. 474; Redmond, pp. 144–147

<sup>96</sup>Anderson, p. xiii, 185

<sup>97</sup>Bonilla – Silva, p. 75; Harris, p. 281.

<sup>98</sup>Bonilla – Silva, p. 76 – 78

<sup>99</sup>Bonilla – Silva, p. 76



This chapter will flesh out the elements in liberalism that further ideas of racial inferiority and superiority in the racial binary of the United States and its impact on the reception of the Lincoln Memorial Concert in the context of diversity in classical music. While this event has become important in the historical narrative on the need for integration, it belies the access white Americans of economic and mobile means had to watch Anderson perform, and her decades – worth of continuous, economically viable performances for white *and* black audiences. This chapter will also address how the usage of liberalism in diversity initiatives of mainstream classical music communities today reflect an ignorance of flourishing networks of classical musicians of color in the United States, which must be addressed if significant progress towards an interracial and multicultural mainstream culture of classical music is to be attained. Anderson did not need the Lincoln Memorial Concert for white Americans to recognize her musical talent and support a career she had maintained for over two decades. But the concert does provide entry to some of the systemic issues in classical music at the time and in the present day, which must be addressed if the genre is to reflect the demographics of the United States.

### **The Controversy and the Concert's Limitations**

In mainstream Marian Anderson historiography, The Lincoln Memorial Concert serves as a reminder for the moment many Americans recognized the hypocrisy of a nation built on freedom while continuing to segregate significant portions of its population. It serves as a marker of Anderson's talent and ability impeded by discrimination. The Lincoln Memorial Concert serves as a moment of racial unity and healing. It serves as moment of racial "transcendence." It is a moment where the limitations of liberalism to rectify systemic discrimination are apparent.

By the time the Daughters of the American Revolution refused Hurok's request to book Anderson due to their "whites only" artist policy, Anderson had performed hundreds of concerts in the Western Hemisphere at the most prestigious locations in classical music performance history. Carnegie Hall. Salzburg Festival. War Opera House. That she would not be allowed entry based on skin color, even with her numerous achievements was, for some, outrageous and un-American. Newspapers like *The Kansas Plains Dealer* covered the Anderson – Constitution Hall controversy, publishing an editorial from *The Detroit Tribune* that contextualizes the incident within the need for intensified action against racial discrimination:

It is encouraging to note the growing public sentiment in our country against racial intolerance, particularly since the outbreak of persecution against the Jews and Catholics in Germany. This brutality to which the German minority and religious groups have been and are being subjected has so shocked the civilized world and sharpened its more humane sensibilities... The recent undemocratic refusal of the Daughters of the American Revolution to permit the noted Negro contralto, Marian Anderson, to appear in a recital at the D.A.R. Constitutional [H]all in Washington, D.C.... have tended to shock the American public into a full realization of the extent to which race prejudice and intolerance are prevalent in our liberty-loving nation, and influential citizens and publications are speaking out against this undemocratic spirit.<sup>100</sup>

Major white musicians such as Kirsten Flagstad, Leopold Stokowski, and Geraldine Farrar voiced their support of Anderson and outrage at the actions of the Daughters of the American Revolution.<sup>101</sup> Attempts were made to reschedule her Constitution Hall performance in the high school auditorium of Central High School in Washington D.C., which also fell through. The School Board's denial of Anderson's request was officially stated as the result of the "for –

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<sup>100</sup>Detroit Tribune, "Best Editorial of the Week: Rally for Racial Tolerance" in *Kansas Plains Dealer* (March 24, 1939). *African American Newspapers Series 1, 1827–1998*. [http://infoweb.newsbank.com.libproxy.lib.unc.edu/iw-search/we/HistArchive/?p\\_product=EANX&p\\_theme=ahnp&p\\_nbld=M59A53LNMTQ5NDU0NTM1OS42ODU4NjA6MT0xMzoxNTIuMi4xNzYuMjQy&p\\_action=doc&d\\_viewref=search&s\\_lastnonissuequeryname=2&p\\_queryname=2&p\\_docnum=4&p\\_docref=v2:12ACD7C7734164EC@EANX-12C6036AA0B50048@2429347-12C6036AD3FCDA10@6](http://infoweb.newsbank.com.libproxy.lib.unc.edu/iw-search/we/HistArchive/?p_product=EANX&p_theme=ahnp&p_nbld=M59A53LNMTQ5NDU0NTM1OS42ODU4NjA6MT0xMzoxNTIuMi4xNzYuMjQy&p_action=doc&d_viewref=search&s_lastnonissuequeryname=2&p_queryname=2&p_docnum=4&p_docref=v2:12ACD7C7734164EC@EANX-12C6036AA0B50048@2429347-12C6036AD3FCDA10@6). (Accessed May 11, 2017).

<sup>101</sup>Keiler, p. 195

private – profit” nature of the recital. However, some white and black Americans viewed this decision as an entrenchment of de facto segregation policies, especially since white performing artists had used the space in previous years.<sup>102</sup> As *The Detroit Tribune* editorial described in its coverage, the racial discrimination impacting Anderson drew comparisons with the oppressive discrimination experienced by German Jews and other marginalized groups by the Third Reich in the 1930s. Sidney Katz of the C.I.O. described the (second) banning of Anderson from Central High School Auditorium by the Board of Education as comparable to “the treatment of Jewish artists in Nazi Germany and Fascist Italy.”<sup>103</sup>

One of the most significant reactions to the growing controversy was First Lady Eleanor Roosevelt’s withdrawal from the Daughters of the American Revolution in February of 1939, intensifying the tension between segregation as an accepted practice and its blatant hypocrisy when brought into conversation with the ideas of liberty and equality on which the nation was founded.<sup>104</sup> Because of the work and collaboration of Hurok with members of the NAACP and First Lady Roosevelt, the Lincoln Memorial Concert was organized and executed. Rather than functioning only to rectify the lack of a performance space for one of the premier concert artists of the twentieth century, the Lincoln Memorial Concert’s organization became part of the broader discourse within American society: the nation’s racial double standard and what that said about its place within a broader global context. The issue was no longer solely how to stop

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<sup>102</sup>Keiler, p. 205

<sup>103</sup>The Washington Post, “Anderson Ban to Be Reconsidered: School Board Group to Review Singer’s Request for Auditorium.” (March 2, 1939). *ProQuest*.  
<http://search.proquest.com/libproxy.lib.unc.edu/docview/151192810/32827BCBB1834A90PQ/1?accountid=14244>. (Accessed May 11, 2017)

<sup>104</sup>Keiler, p. 202

discrimination against an individual, but how to draw attention to the urgent need for America to live up to its democratic ideals.

Both aims were achieved on that Easter day in 1939. The discrimination towards Anderson was proved shortsighted, and the concert became part of the narrative of integration and racial equality in the United States. But what was not achieved in the following decades, notwithstanding the advances made in the civil rights movement of the 1950s and 1960s, was structural and systemic racial equality and equity in every aspect of American society. And Anderson's participation in the organization of the Lincoln Memorial Concert was shockingly minor, considering the event occurred in part to address an incident that directly impacted her. This fact is downplayed, if not completely absent from many retellings of this historical moment, as it threatens the presentation of Eleanor Roosevelt, the NAACP, and others as nobly challenging racial injustice in the public sphere. It requires us to ask: why was Anderson absent from the initial planning? Was it tied to trust in Hurok's handling of the situation?<sup>105</sup> Would she have been open to the idea considering her fierce desire to retain control of her public image through her words and actions? As will be illustrated in the remainder of this chapter, Anderson's reflections on the organization of the concert suggest that she would not have approved of such a public response if included in the early development stages. Her concern with audiences' (mis)interpretation of her character and intention to not cause disruption (significant as it was part of her navigation of multiple encounters with racist behavior), might have impeded the cultivation of a national outcry against segregation.

The published materials that suggest this reticence on Anderson's part are present in her autobiography and comprehensive biography by Allen Keiler. In *My Lord, What a Morning*,

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<sup>105</sup> Anderson, p. 189

Anderson's primary emotions in her reflections on the Constitution Hall controversy, were surprise and skepticism. Surprise that her rejection had become a focus of national and international attention and skepticism on the need for this public outcry.<sup>106</sup> The chapter chronicling the organization of the Lincoln Memorial Concert, "Easter Sunday," provides multiple moments of Anderson expressing her misgivings and her thought process which led to her acceptance of the event:

I was informed of the plan for the outdoor concert before the news was published. Indeed, I was asked whether I approved. I said yes, but the yes did not come easily or quickly. I don't like a lot of show, and one could not tell in advance what direction the affair would take. I studied my conscience. In principle the idea was sound, but it could not be comfortable to me as an individual. As I thought further, I could see that my significance as an individual was small in this affair. I had become, whether I liked it or not, a symbol, representing my people. I had to appear...It would be misleading, however, to say that once the decision was made I was without doubts.<sup>107</sup>

Anderson's critique of this public response to a personal discrimination is likely emblematic of her intense desire for privacy to live and enjoy her life where she could avoid any misreading of her character and motivations. Her misgivings are also important when considering the construction of her career narrative by journalists, activists, politicians, and historians of her era in service of integrationist ideology and action. The rhetoric used to critique the decision of the Daughters of the American Revolution tied the racism of segregationist policies with the encroaching threat of Nazi Germany and fascism on the European continent. Anderson's skepticism and defense of her lack of public engagement with reporters in the midst of the Constitution Hall controversy are indicative of the ways her thoughts and opinions have been pushed to the background of her own life's story. Though we have encountered a few instances

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<sup>106</sup>Anderson, p. 188

<sup>107</sup>Anderson, pp. 189–190

of Anderson disagreeing with Hurok's organization of her touring schedule, with such disagreements sometimes leading to him conceding to her wishes, it must be remembered that those interactions occurred privately. Anderson never wanted to appear disagreeable, ungrateful, or difficult in public, which may have played a role in Hurok, Roosevelt, and others doing actions they knew (or assumed) she was not willing to do, or felt she could not afford to do in a public space. Anderson was aware of the negative repercussions that would come from a black American woman being openly critical about racism in the country, which could result in negative reaction much more swift and impactful than if she was no longer a Hurok artist.

But wouldn't these discussions on how to handle the Constitution Hall controversy and finding a different performance venue in Washington D.C. still require her perspective, suggestions, and reflections? Why was she not directly involved? It is impossible to glean the intentions of individuals, living or dead, but the fact that Anderson was not considered a necessary player in the consultation of the form of protest in response to her rejection from a respected concert hall, illustrates the disconnect white and black Americans had between Marian Anderson the performer, and Marian Anderson the black, middle – class woman. Keiler highlights this disconnect in his discussion of how Hurok, NAACP officials and others used the Central High School incident as fuel for their vision of using this discriminatory act on the part of the Daughters of the American Revolution to bring to the attention of the (white) public the need for integration and an end to racial inequality through a public event.

On the surface, the Central High School incident was another failure: Anderson was once again barred from a performance venue by segregationist laws and practices. But Anderson could have had a chance to perform in the Central High School auditorium. The Committee on the Community Use of Schools ruled in her favor, as long as this acceptance “would not be taken as

a precedent.”<sup>108</sup> Keiler continues that Anderson, while continuously updated on the nature of the controversy, was never directly asked if she wanted to agree to the terms set forth by the committee and approved by the Board of Education.<sup>109</sup> Not including Anderson in decisions that would impact how she was viewed as a performer and remembered in the historical record was obviously disrespectful, but it had become a habitual practice in the rescheduling of Anderson’s Washington D.C. performance after the Daughters of the American Revolution refused her the use of their hall.<sup>110</sup> Anderson’s reflection on the progression of these actions on her behalf mask her anger and barely mask her frustration that the controversy had spiraled out of her control. While the terms put forth by the committee were viewed as “hollow,” Keiler asserts that there is a strong possibility that Anderson would have accepted the terms and performed if her opinion had been viewed as necessary before a decision was made:

In the case of the School Board’s offer, even with the proviso that her appearance could not be seen as a precedent, she would have been strongly inclined to accept. In such dilemmas her thinking was always clear: accept graciously any show of support and compromise from your opponents, even with strings attached, for that is the only way that people make progress in social understanding. If it was up to Anderson, she would have agreed to sing...<sup>111</sup>

Anderson was never naïve about the racist system in which she lived, but in this instance it appears that her navigation of what was acceptable language and articulation of thoughts and feelings by a respectable, middle-class black woman did not provide the intensity she needed for her opinion to be respected. The disconnect between how people received her voice as a singer was automatically applied to her voice outside of the performing sphere, an association Anderson

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<sup>108</sup>Keiler, p. 205

<sup>109</sup>Keiler, p. 206

<sup>110</sup>Ibid

<sup>111</sup>Ibid

herself helped craft. To perform classical music is to be respectable; therefore, Anderson herself is respectable. She will not say or do anything that may be uncomfortable for members of the establishment.

Anderson's reflections of this period downplay the systemic roots of racism she experienced in every aspect of her professional life, again reflecting this controlled intention not to upset the status quo. But her very presence in the classical music mainstream caused a disturbance, though it was not always viewed as such. She challenged ideas of who could or could not perform classical vocal repertoire. Her programming decisions standardized spirituals on voice recitals and included arrangements of those works by black composers. She required the halls she performed in to allow for interracial and non-segregated seating, and in the 1950s refused to perform in segregated performance halls.<sup>112</sup> Her activism may not have been expressed through boycotts, marches, or speeches, and her response sometimes fed into societal expectations that privileged white ethnocentrism. Yet it still challenged mainstream expectations with a sustained approach that is often overshadowed by the Lincoln Memorial Concert.

While the concert did bring the discrimination and hypocrisy of racial segregation to the forefront of American discourses, the liberal rhetoric of racial unity was tied to notions of colorblindness and universalism that could provide equality on the surface without disrupting the societal organization that retained the dominance of white Americans of the middle and upper classes. Due to the destabilization of Nazi Germany and fascist Italy in Europe (further destabilized when Germany invaded Poland in September of 1939), America needed a united front that could not be achieved if racism was not addressed. In spite of writings, protests,

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<sup>112</sup>“Marian Anderson.” *YouTube*.  
[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nH4cfftJUow&list=PLhJh3vZTgexMh6yQ\\_Zk4UBRILsLcAvwqN&index=2](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nH4cfftJUow&list=PLhJh3vZTgexMh6yQ_Zk4UBRILsLcAvwqN&index=2).  
(Accessed May 11, 2017); Anderson, pp. 249–250



conventions, and speeches by black American women, men, and white allies calling for political and judicial action against legal racism and racist and gendered violence, the needs of the nation with the growing threat of another major conflict required the federal government to rethink its “hands off” approach regarding states’ individual policies on racial integration and segregation and bring Americans of color into the fold of mainstream American citizenship.<sup>113</sup>

But only to a point. As Bonilla-Silva discusses within *Racism without Racists*, liberalism allows for the sustainment of white dominance, celebration of multi-culturalism, and colorblind racism to exist simultaneously. Its championing of “not seeing” race does not dismantle the constructed categories of racial differences. Instead, it folds individuals of color into the political and cultural structures that have become racialized as white, the “neutral standard.”

Universalism places histories and epistemologies with origins in (white) national and cultural contexts as applicable to all human experience, while the systems of knowledge and histories of communities of color are marginalized or viewed as not applicable to white individuals.

As a musical and cultural component of American society, classical music culture and mainstream discourse participate in this foregrounding of specific repertoires and histories that prioritize the stories of white, cisgender American and European men. Though Anderson’s white contemporaries vocally supported multiracial classical music performance spaces and the mid – late twentieth century saw many black classical vocalists become major figures in the operatic world (Jessye Norman, Grace Bumbry, George Shirley, Leontyne Price), mainstream classical music remained a predominately white space, and still is to this day. The lack of racial diversity in American classical music has been a constant thread in the genre’s discourse of the past

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<sup>113</sup>Kersten, p. 14

twenty years.<sup>114</sup> Each year articles bring forth the dismal number of men and women of color in professional orchestras, conservatories and universities, opera companies, and administrative positions each year.<sup>115</sup> Organizations such as the Sphinx Organization, Chineké Ensemble, Videmus, and many others were founded to help classical musicians of color network and provide young students of color with access to private music study and attend performances by world-renowned musicians.<sup>116</sup> While these groups and organizations have made positive contributions and are needed to provide educational and professional support and networking opportunities for classical musicians of color, they cannot do all the work on their own. The bulk of the work lies with the gatekeepers and powerholders in mainstream classical music venues, ensembles, and board rooms.

The liberal foundation of recent diversity initiatives by professional orchestras walk a line of bringing new demographics into their space while retaining the financial and critical support of their traditional (predominately white) audiences. On the surface, this provides space a few times each season for programming black composers, hosting black performers, or commissioning a new work by a composer of color, but it fails in thoroughly implementing change in the following ways. First, it does not deconstruct the classical music canon which

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<sup>114</sup>Phillips Jr., J. C. (2016). "Flattened Multiplicities: On Musical Genre and Personal Identity" in *VAN: An independent online classical music magazine*. <https://van-us.atavist.com/flattened-multiplicities>. (Accessed December 1, 2016); Colloquy: Race, Ethnicity, and the Profession (1-4). *Musicology Now*. <http://musicologynow.ams-net.org/2016/11/colloquy-race-ethnicity-and-profession.html>. (Accessed December 8, 2016); Education and Community Engagement (EDC) Pre-Conference Convening. *League of American Orchestras Conference 2016*. <http://www.americanorchestras.org/conferences-meetings/conference-2016.html>. (Accessed December 1, 2016)

<sup>115</sup>Wise, Brian and Naomi Lewin. "American Orchestras Grapple with Lack of Diversity." *WQXR*. Feb. 6, 2015. <http://www.wqxr.org/story/american-orchestras-grapple-diversity/>. (Accessed May 11, 2017)

<sup>116</sup>*Chineké Foundation*. <http://www.chineke.org/>. (Accessed June 20, 2017); *National Association of Negro Musicians*. <http://www.nanm.org/> (Accessed June 20, 2017); *Sphinx Organization*. <http://www.sphinxmusic.org/>. (Accessed June 20, 2017); *Videmus Inc.* <http://www.videmus.org/index.php> (Accessed June 20, 2017).

privileges deceased, white European and American male composers. Second, it marginalizes composers and performers of color when their concerts are programmed as tangential to the primary concert season (see Cincinnati Symphony Orchestra's series, *Classical Roots*).<sup>117</sup> Third, it ignores the communities of classical musicians of color that have been active for over a century. Anderson's career pre-1935 was dependent on the venues and concert series of black colleges such as Hampton and West Virginia Institute and black audiences who loved the repertoire she performed and who could attend the concerts. To insinuate that black and brown Americans have only been recently exposed to classical music due to the benevolent actions of major (white) professional orchestras is untrue and insulting to the thousands of black classical performers, teachers, composers, and patrons active today.<sup>118</sup>

These liberal underpinnings also allow for the retrenchment of white dominance in opera productions. While the societal taboo of articulating racism in direct language has been lessened slightly in the past few months, other approaches to retain prominence of individuals racialized as white in a variety of media and literature have become utilized. Statements such as "they do not fit the part," "their timbre isn't suited for our interpretation of this work," are often applied to performers' voice types, an approach meant to turn a racially biased decision into an aesthetic choice.<sup>119</sup> The number of black vocalists in major opera companies has decreased considerably in the past few decades, aided by changes in terms of company contracts but also due to the firm idea that the presence of black bodies and "black" voices is an isolating one on the part of the

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<sup>117</sup>"Classical Roots, 2017." *Cincinnati Symphony Orchestra*. <http://cincinnatisymphony.org/concerts-plus-events/special-concerts-and-events/classical-roots-2017/>. (Accessed May 11, 2017).

<sup>118</sup>Lebrecht, Norman. "We Never Had a Relationship with the African-American Community" in *Slipped Disc*. (April 6, 2017). <https://slippedisc.com/2017/04/we-never-had-a-relationship-with-the-african-american-community/>. (Accessed June 20, 2017)

<sup>119</sup>Eidsheim, p. 661-662.

white viewer.<sup>120</sup> Classical music must be universal and colorblind, but this “embracing” of racial difference does not include redistribution of power and equity. Until that core problem is addressed and action taken to dismantle it, racial diversity at the mainstream level will not be achieved.

The Lincoln Memorial Concert in Anderson’s narrative is positioned as a moment when Anderson was not judged by her perceived racial identity but by the talent and beauty of her voice. But it is not a disservice for her racial identity to be acknowledged. The problem is that racial difference is posited as emblematic of superiority and inferiority and in an attempt to “correct” this erroneous social construction, people attempt to “ignore” race. Taking away the language in that way makes it more difficult to address the problems, privileges, violence, and abuse that the race concept, racialization, and racism have created for Americans of color.

To understand Marian Anderson as a black female classical vocalist is to acknowledge her success was the result of her dedicated work, informed decisions, and keen awareness of the restrictions placed upon her raced and gendered body in her home country, which required working and collaborating with established white Americans in her field. Just as it is dangerous to continue diversity initiatives within systemic frameworks such as colorblindness and universalism that sustain white dominance instead of breaking it down, it is dangerous to ignore or downplay the role of Anderson’s race in her professional career. It should not be the one and only lens through which we understand her life. To do so is a gross oversimplification of how Americans of color, past and present, have navigated systemic racism and crafted complex lives for themselves and their families amidst state –sanctioned oppression. But to continue to view any mention of race and racial identity for individuals of color as indicative of divisiveness,

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<sup>120</sup>Ibid

exclusion, or embracement of marginalization, is to perpetrate the lie that to see race is akin to the emotional, mental, and physical racial violence Americans of color have experienced every day for the entirety of this nation's existence.

To be "black" is to be "American," "Latino," "European," "cautious," "shy," "annoyed," "joyful," it is one of many ways to be a citizen of a nation and of the globe. Though at times Anderson expressed wanting to not be judged by the color of her skin, (a phrase often cited to illustrate the need for a colorblind, race free United States), this reflection would benefit from a deeper reading.<sup>121</sup> As Dr. King famously stated on the Lincoln Memorial steps where he hoped that his children would one day "...not be judged by the color of their skin but by the content of their character," the want to "not be judged by the color of one's skin" does not mean, "do not see my skin color or racial identity."<sup>122</sup> It is saying: *do not apply the stereotypes you hold towards people who look like me onto my person, for that is not even close to the person that I am. It is not your job or your place to define me.* It is the multiplicity of black American culture that is still too often met with surprise and skepticism. This complexity has always been sorely needed in mainstream discourses of black American life, musical culture, and classical music. It has been sorely needed in discussions of Marian Anderson.

Shying away from engaging with race and its impact on Anderson, classical music, and classical musicians of color hinders the multiplicity of understanding the history of this genre. It is needed for more complex studies and biographies of individuals such as Anderson to be

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<sup>121</sup>Jones, p. 1

<sup>122</sup>Younge, Gary. *The Speech: The Story Behind Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.'s Dream*. Chicago: Haymarket Books, 2013, p. xv, 13; Colby, Tanner. "Politicians Have Abused Martin Luther King Jr's Dream." *TheGuardian.com*. (August 23, 2013). <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2013/aug/23/martin-luther-king-dream-speech-misunderstand> (Accessed June 20, 2017)

researched and published. It is needed so that organizations and schools such as the National Association of Negro Musicians, Washington Conservatory, and Oberlin Conservatory might be understood within the formalization and institutionalization of classical music in the United States. It is needed so that the lie that classical music is not part of the black American experience may die a slow and thorough death.

This is but a brief investigation of Anderson's activity in the cultivation of her career and how it aligned with and questioned ideas of black womanhood and musicality in early twentieth century America. There are many aspects of her life, many words she spoke and wrote, that have not had a chance to make it into this document. But history is living, breathing, and ever expanding. I intend for this paper to be a window for other students, scholars, and casual readers of Marian Anderson, classical music, black American history, and civil rights, to question the narratives they know and to delve through the layers of Anderson's career. Anderson was polite, amiable, and firm. She was reserved and dominated the recital stage with confidence and authority. She performed Florence Price, Franz Schubert, R. Nathaniel Dett, and Jean Sibelius. She remains an inspiring figure in the history of civil rights and for black Americans past and present. Marian Anderson pushed against discrimination in the United States on her own terms. The least she is owed is recognition and celebration of her agency in the creation of her successful musical career.

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